

THE UN-COMFORT ZONE

With Robert Wilson



Chill Out

The boys slumped against the wall of the dug-out; you could read the despair on their faces. "What's the point?" mumbled the right fielder, "We're just going to lose again." The team was on an eight game losing streak, with a record of 3 & 8 and five games left to play.

As the coach for the nine-year old Little League Orioles, I was frustrated. We had some of the finest talent in the league including the best pitcher and the best hitter, but the boys had already given up. I thought, "What can you do when there is no hope of winning?" It was then that I remembered one of the biggest upsets in figure skating history.

I squatted down in front of them and said, "Lean in, boys, I want to tell you a story about a 16 year old girl who got to go to the 2002 Winter Olympic Games as an ice skater."

Her name is Sarah Hughes and she barely made the team. She was one of the youngest members, and she would be competing against the biggest names in figure skating - women who had already won world titles. No one expected her to win. No one expected her to even place in the top three. Sarah wasn't expecting to win either.

"So," I asked the boys, "what is the point of competing when you know you cannot win?"

"Well, it would be pretty cool just to be in the Olympics," offered the first baseman.

"And, that's what Sarah thought." I replied. "She was just thrilled to be there; and she made it her goal to simply do her best and have fun.

When it was her turn to skate, she chose to do some of the hardest spins, jumps and footwork that an ice skater can do. Why not, she thought, because no one expected her to win. There was no pressure on her to win, and because there was no pressure she did all of those difficult moves perfectly."

After Sarah skated, all the big name skaters took their turns. Each one of them tried the difficult moves, but each one was nervous - trying too hard to win - and each one made mistakes. They fell on the ice. And, you can't fall down in the Olympics and win. In the end, only Sarah skated without falling down, and she won the gold medal.

Sarah won, because she didn't believe there was a chance for her to win. She went out on the ice to have fun. Boys, that is where you are today. You no longer have to worry about winning. Our record is so bad, that even if we win the next five games, we still won't place first, second or even third. So, what is the point of playing? The point of playing right now is to have fun. There is no pressure on you anymore. I want you to go out on the baseball field today and just have a good time.

They went on to win that day. In fact, they won the last five games. The boys finally started playing at their full potential. At the end of the season, as we entered the playoffs, the top three teams were looking nervously at the Orioles. I'd like to tell you we placed in the playoffs, but once again with the pressure back on, the Orioles choked and got knocked out in the first round.

The trick is to take your mind off the prize, and focus instead on enjoying the project at hand. We've all heard: "It's the journey, not the destination." There is a lot of truth in that cliché. The idea being that we should experience the task as an end in itself. Poet, Crystal Boyd, said it best in her book, *Midnight Muse*: "Work like you don't need money, Love like you've never been hurt, And dance like no one's watching."

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