

## A Little Coaching

*The two important things I did learn were that you are as powerful and strong as you allow yourself to be, and that the most difficult part of any endeavor is taking the first step, making the first decision.*

Robyn Davidson

For me, it was normal to feel lost at the inter-camp track and swim meet. Four camps of kids were ready to lead their teams to a blue ribbon and win the day. Not me. I was too little to be a leader and too skinny to be an athlete. I knew this by the time I was twelve, because my camp counselors and the other kids reminded me of it every chance they got. So when our camp needed a fourth runner in the two-mile race around the lake, I knew I was no one's first choice.

I hid in the shade of a maple tree as they called the names of the runners. My body tensed as I heard a counselor call, "Noah! Where's Noah! He's in this race!"

It was Bronto. His name was really Alan Bronstein, but everyone called him Bronto. He spotted me under the tree

and lifted me up by my elbows. It was more than just his name that qualified him for his "Brontoism."

"Noah, we need a twelve-year-old who hasn't been in other events to run the two-mile."

"But you've got three guys."

"We need four. You're in."

He gave me a push toward the starting line. Trying to save myself from the humiliation of taking last place as four camps watched, I pleaded with him.

"But I don't know the way around the lake!"

"You're in. Just follow Craig." Bronto smiled.

Craig was my friend and the fastest runner in our camp. And then Bronto said, "When you make it to the last stretch on the field, just throw your head back and run."

At the starting line, I stood next to Craig and trembled.

"On your mark . . . get set . . ." The gun cracked and sixteen of us took off. Kicking up dust on the dirt road leading to the lakeshore path, I was determined not to get lost. I stayed close on Craig's heels. A little too close for Craig, I guess, because he shouted at me, "Back off!"

I did. Two guys passed me but I kept my eye on Craig.

It was tiring. The distance was widening between Craig and me. We made the turn from the dusty road onto the muddy, wooded trail that wound around the lake back to the field. Through the trees I saw Craig slip and fall out of sight. A runner from another camp passed him.

In a moment, he was up again and running. He yelled to me, "Watch the roots. They're slimy!" Struggling to keep my legs moving, I looked down and saw the tree root stripped of its bark. I puffed over it. Fifty yards later I was out of breath, but I turned up the hill into the sunlight again, which shone on the open field. My energy was spent. I scrambled up, ready to see the rest of the pack crossing the finish line and was about to drop to my knees and quit, when I saw not the fifteen guys that I thought

would be in front of me, but three. The crowd was roaring but I could hear Bronto over the rest of them, yelling "Run!"

I threw my head back and told my legs to go. I never looked ahead and I never looked back for those last hundred yards. I felt free. Nobody was telling me what I was, or what I wasn't. My legs were running a race against my brain and I was winning.

I didn't know when I crossed the finish line. Bronto caught me and I collapsed—winded, but happy that I finished. Then I realized Bronto wasn't just holding me up. He was hugging me!

"You flew! You flew, man! Second! You passed two guys!"

There was a crowd of kids around me patting me on the back, giving me high-fives. I had come in second. Craig had finished first . . . by a step, they said.

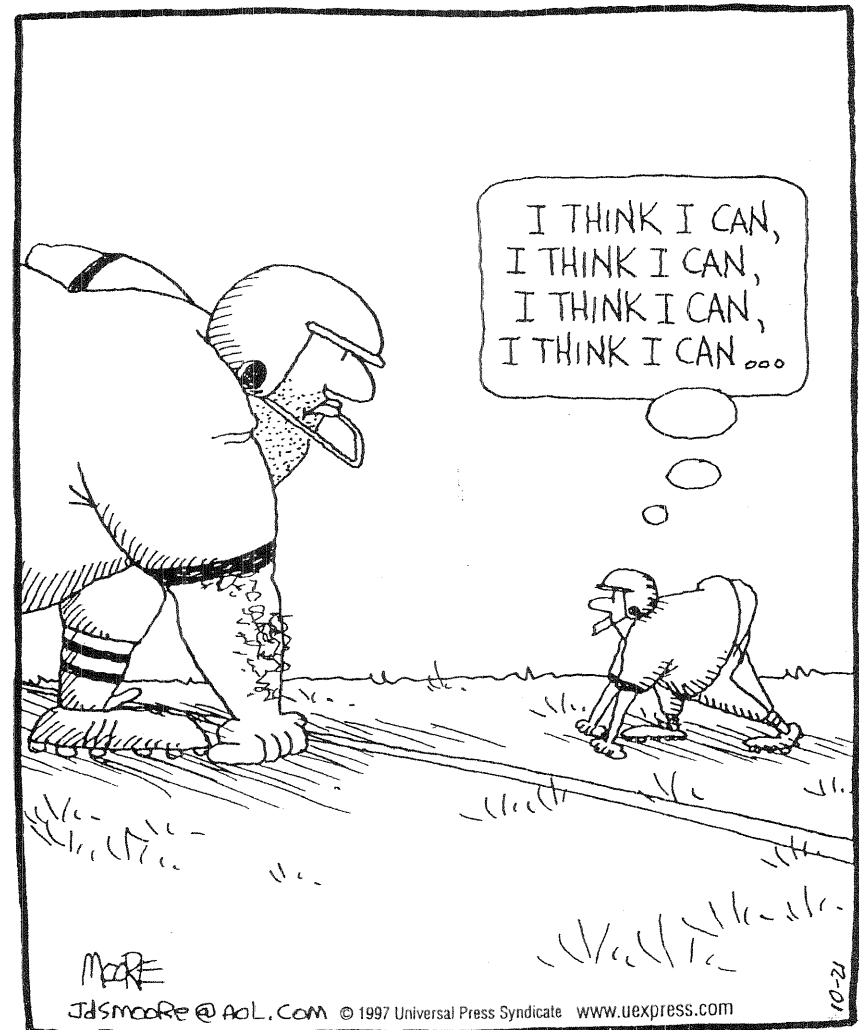
They gave me a red second-place ribbon. Even with that and all the high-fives and cheers of the day, the best prize that I walked away with was my confidence. That year I discovered I could do a lot of things if I put my energy into them.

I never got to say thanks to Bronto right after the race. But during the next events, I spotted him over at the lake. He was coaching a reluctant kid who was going to swim in the freestyle relay. I ran over to cheer him on. With Bronto coaching, I had no doubt that this was going to be another good race.

Noah Edelson

## IN THE BLEACHERS

By Steve Moore



## Two Tickets to the Big Game

*I discovered I always have choices, and sometimes it's only a choice of attitude.*

Judith M. Knowlton

Two tickets. Only two tickets to the big quarterfinals basketball game.

Three pairs of eyes all focused on the tickets in Dad's outstretched hand. Marcus, the oldest, spoke the question running through everyone's mind: "Only two tickets? But, Dad, which of us gets to go with you?"

"Yeah, Daddy, who gets to go?" repeated Caleb, the youngest.

"Dad, can't you get any more tickets?" I asked. I might be the in-between sister, but I was just as eager as my basketball-crazy brothers were for a night out with Dad.

"I'm afraid not," Dad answered. "Mr. Williams only has two season tickets. He was thoughtful enough to offer the tickets to Saturday's game to me when he found out he'd be out of town this weekend."

Dad scratched his head. "Caleb, don't you think you're a little young to enjoy a professional basketball game...?"

"Am not! Am not!" Caleb insisted. "I know all the best shooters! I know the team's record! I know..."

"All right, all right," Dad finally had to agree. He shifted his focus and tried again. "Jill, since you're a girl..."

Before I could respond, Mom came to my defense. "Don't you dare say 'because you're a girl,'" she said to Dad. "Jill's out there practicing at the hoop with Marcus and all of his friends, and she's better than quite a few of them, too!"

"Okay, okay," Dad held up his hands in a "time-out" signal. "I guess I'll have to figure out a fair way of choosing between the three of you by tomorrow morning. I'll have to decide who deserves it most. Let me sleep on it—okay, guys... and girls?" he added quickly before Mom and I could correct him.

The next morning, Marcus hurried into the kitchen and plopped down at the breakfast table. "Where's Dad?" he asked as he reached for a box of cereal.

"And 'good morning' to you, too," I responded in between sips of orange juice.

"Sorry, but you can guess what I was dreaming about all last night," Marcus explained. "So—where is he?"

"He and Mom went to pick up some books from the library," Caleb answered, digging his spoon into a mound of cereal.

"And he said we should all get started on our Saturday chores as soon as we finish breakfast," I added.

"Chores! He's got to be kidding," Marcus said as he set down his glass of milk with a thud. "How can we concentrate on chores when the big game is a mere eleven hours away?"

"Parents! They just don't understand!" I agreed, popping the last piece of English muffin into my mouth.

"I'm going for the morning newspaper," Marcus

announced. "There's probably a preview of tonight's game in the sports section."

"Wait for me!" Caleb added, slurping the last of his milk and dashing after his brother.

The back door snapped shut as the two boys trotted down the driveway. I looked at the breakfast table in front of me: tiny puddles of milk, bits of soggy cereal here and there, a small glob of grape jelly melting in the morning sunlight. *Well, I thought to myself as I pushed my chair away from the table, looks like Saturday morning chores start right here.*

A few minutes later, as I was washing off the kitchen countertops, I heard the familiar "thump . . . thump . . . thump" of the basketball bouncing off of the driveway. I glanced out of the kitchen window and saw Marcus practicing his hook shot while Caleb cheered him on. Frustrated, I knocked on the window three times. When the boys looked up, I meaningfully held up a kitchen sponge and dishtowel.

Marcus casually nodded to me and held up five fingers. Taking his cue from his older brother, Caleb did the same.

*Sure, five more minutes!* I thought to myself. *I'll just bet.* I opened the lower cabinet and tossed an empty muffin package into the almost-full wastebasket. I reached for a twister to tie up the plastic liner bag and carted it out to the garbage container outside the back door.

"He dribbles . . . he shoots! If I make this next shot, I get the tickets to tonight's game," Marcus teased as he shot for the hoop. "Hooray! Two points! And I get the ticket!"

"Do not!" Caleb shouted.

"You guys, Mom and Dad will be back any minute," I reminded them as I lifted the lid on the garbage container and placed the full plastic bag inside.

"Okay, we're coming in to help," Marcus said, dribbling the basketball around and around Caleb, who tried again

and again to steal it. "Just one more minute."

"Yeah, just one more minute," Caleb added as he finally managed to tip the ball out of his brother's grasp.

I shook my head from side to side as I began to replace the lid on the garbage container. Then a flash of white on the inside of the heavy black plastic lid caught my attention. A white envelope . . . it must have stuck to the lid by accident. But then I noticed that the envelope was actually taped to the inside of the lid, and someone had written the word "Congratulations!" on the front of the envelope, too.

I lifted the flap on the envelope and pulled out a folded piece of paper. "To the one who deserves to go," the paper read, and inside of it was a ticket to the basketball game!

*I don't believe it, I thought. I'm the one that gets to go! But how did Dad know?*

Then I thought back to Dad's comment last night: "I'll have to decide who deserves it most." I smiled. Leave it to Dad to figure out who the most deserving kid really was.

By now, Marcus and Caleb had worn themselves out. They shuffled toward the back door. "Come on, little brother, we'd better get started on our chores if we want to have a chance at getting that ticket to the game."

I turned in their direction and held up the ticket, the note and the envelope. "It might be a little too late for that," I said with a sly grin.

Marcus and Caleb looked at each other with question marks in their eyes, as Mom and Dad's car pulled into the driveway.

That evening turned out to be as special as I'd imagined: Two seats at center court, and a dad and his daughter cheering their team to victory. It was a long-remembered lesson in responsibility from a dad who let his kids make their own choices and earn their own rewards.

*J. Styron Madsen*