Mrs. Veldman

9/25/2014

3rd hour

Game Changer

Walking slowly over to me, Mrs. Zmyslo, my 7th grade PE teacher, placed the envelope in my hand. She continued to walk towards Joy and then to Teresa, placing envelopes in their hands. If I hold it up to the light, maybe I can see through it, I thought. The coach slowly walked away, and my two best friends and I knew it was time to open our envelopes. I ripped open the envelope and six words jumped out at me: “You did not make the team.”  
 It was early November of 1986 at Richards Jr. High in Fraser, a small suburb about fifteen miles northeast of Detroit. The secretary made the announcement that try-outs for the seventh grade basketball team would begin in two weeks. Joy and Teresa, my two closest friends, came up to me after second hour and excitedly shouted, “We should do this! We should try this!”   
Other than youth group, I don't have anything going on right now, I thought to myself. After being on soccer and swim teams without my friends for the last two years, it would be fun to play on a team with people from my school. “Sure,” I reluctantly replied. “Let's try out.”  
 Practices began in the middle of November, and they consisted of running, shooting, and passing drills as well as scrimmages. Try-outs lasted for one week, and I learned a great deal about the skills of basketball, but the most important lesson I gained was that this was not a sport that I enjoyed playing for two hours a day after school. Since I wanted to do well to be on the team with my friends, I tried my hardest, and I was eager to see if that would be enough.  
 “You did not make the team.” After reading my note from Mrs. Zmyslo, I wasn't particularly surprised, but I was disappointed that I wouldn't be able to spend more time with my friends after school. While Joy and Teresa were playing basketball with the other seventh grade girls on the team, I focused on getting back into swimming and getting ready for the upcoming winter championship meets. After hearing about how difficult practices were and how difficult the games were and how difficult it was going to be to beat our rival, I realized that it was not such a bad thing that I didn't make the team.  
 Not making the team is an event I remember well because prior to trying out for seventh grade basketball I had never been cut from an activity before and I hadn't known what it was like to face rejection. I became a stronger athlete since this event allowed me to invest my time and energy into swimming which I was good at instead of basketball which I tolerated because of my friends. That swim season was a turning point for me because it was when I focused on pursuing what I enjoyed and I gained more confidence as a result. As I reflect on this event, the six words that jump out at me are not, “You did not make the team” but are instead “You learned something important about yourself,” and that is a more valuable lesson.