



SECOND PLACE RECIPIENT

More Than A Game

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The sun shone on the turf as my sister's middle school team ran out for the Harvest Cup finals, a district-wide soccer tournament. I stood on the sideline, not as a player this time, but as their coach.

It felt full-circle. Throughout elementary and middle school, Harvest Cup had been the highlight of my year. I remembered training with friends after school, reaching the finals twice, only to fall short both times. I knew the weight of the game and how a single play could result in victory or heartbreak.

Midway through the final, we held a 1-0 lead. It was when the referee's whistle blew as my sister went down clutching her ankle. She tried to get up quickly, walking it off, and told the referee she was fine. When I yelled to ask if she was okay, she responded yes and to let her continue playing. My parents behind me echoed her wish: leave her in to play.

I froze. Keeping her on the field gave us our best chance of winning. Pulling her out meant weakening the team, as they would have to play a man down. It could potentially lose the championship. My sister's determination tugged at me. I saw how she practiced at home and prepared for this moment. I knew if I were in her place, I would have begged for the same. But I remembered how she has previously had ankle injuries. I imagined the long-term consequences if she kept spraining her ankle without any rest.

In that moment, I thought about what Harvest Cup had once meant to me. I chased the win, and when my team and I lost, it stung. But the sting eventually faded. An injury, however, could be permanent. That moment of clarity decided for me. I subbed her out.

I heard my parents groan. Minutes later, the other team equalized. The game would have to progress into penalty kicks. I began to doubt my decision. Had I betrayed my sister by subbing her out, taking away her moment to perform after all of her hours of practice? Would our team fall short, like how I fell short in my Harvest Cup games? Eventually, to my relief, we won in the shootout.

Looking back, I see that moment as more than just a coaching decision. It forced me to weigh short-term gain against long-term care. In that moment, I chose the ethical decisions: to protect my sister, even if it meant risking the trophy or upsetting my sister, parents, and the rest of the team. Ethics are the standard we hold ourselves to, despite an easier route. In that moment, I could have taken the easy path and kept my sister in, protecting the score and appeasing my parents. When I played in Harvest Cup, I thought all that mattered was who took home a medal.

With the new perspective as a coach, I learned to place responsibility above results.