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Jimmy's Faithful Jousting:

Their First Season Together



Have you ever seen a bigger bunch of clowns in your life, Mr. Founder?

So, Coach, what exactly are we supposed to call you around here? You don't know us, we don't know you, and the only folks we've known as coaches we normally called mommy and daddy.

Oh, so you are just Coach Andy.

OK, then, Coach Andy!

I'll be fine, believe me, once I get over this laughing hyena fit of mine.

Guys, move ON, really? The ball is right in front of your goal, you're on defense and half of you are chasing the dandelion puffs that are blowing off the grass! Do you even hear every single mother and father in the dang universe telling you to "Clear the ball! Clear the ball!"

We're seven and eight years old now, remember? Are you actually expecting a t-ball frame for a soccer ball to be planted on the field by this new guy called Coach Andy? I'm giggling my bejeezus off, too, but do you remember what we are trying to do out here? The coach is not going to plant the ball, on the tee, into the grass, count to three, and then grandly announce, "It's time for you to kick the ball!"

Coach Andy—whoever you are—I get it, I really do, when twelve other kids my age or around my age don't know each other, and besides, they don't know you, either.

Oh, dang brother, will you look at that, you actually missed the ball when you tried to kick the dang thing! You've played soccer since the beginning of time in kindergarten, right? Is this gonna be what those announcers on TV call a really l-o-n-g season?

Coach Andy, this is hilarious, but I think we're doomed!

I know, I know, they call this thing eight and under rec league. Fun, fun, fun, all day and all night jollies. Tell me the last time any of us got the jollies chasing dandelion puffs and scoring own goals.

Well, let me tell you *my* idea of what fun is!

Mom and dad might mention to you that I'm nothing but a dang craw sticker—yeah, I know, I've already stuck a couple in your craw—but believe me, this thing out here people call fun will soon become a pain and I hope the other twelve of us believe in the same thing someday. That might take more than awhile when I think about it—and as for mom and dad, they've been stuck craws for each other for quite a while, that is, when they actually talk to each other, since I'm with mom during the week and with dad every other weekend.

Yeah, that, Coach Andy.

For the time being, seeing the fourth—or is it the tenth—kid on our team slip, trip, and land on their butts while going for the ball will have to suffice for fun.

Coach Andy, hold on for one split second! Now you don't see me walking away from this comedy club, do you? You know I can't drive for another ten years or something like that.

C'mon now, you don't even know my name!

Unbelievable, this new coach is just like a new teacher, and he doesn't take roll call? Every new year in school, and every first day of school here in this city called Wichita, and all over this state called Kansas, that's what happens. Did you ever think that's why you see a circus out there instead of a soccer practice?

Oh, so you want to know my name all of a sudden! Sure, Coach Andy, I'm Jimmy, and I'll be your starting right halfback sooner than soon.

You say I don't look or act like a normal third grader, well one reason may be that I skipped second grade. Yeah, I'm really smart, you figured that one out quicker than the whole dandelion chasing debacle out there! And I'll guarantee you the best grades on the whole team before you know it to boot!

That's a soccer joke, get it?

Coach Andy, please don't roll your eyes when you ask me that, *of course* I go to Wichita Collegiate School, but can you guess where I want to play college soccer someday? No, not Indiana. Chapel Hill, that's really a laugh! Give up?

Ever hear of Wake Forest, Coach? Even if it is Baptist, the God thing won't ever apply to me there or anywhere else ever since Mr. and Mrs. Sticker Craw called it quits after meeting and marrying at Wichita State. Besides, the God thing never made any three, four, five, or six year-old sense to me anyway. Yours truly has no brother sticker craw or sister sticker craw to help me figure all this out, either.

Sooner or later, and if you don't know it by now, you will hear Sticker Craw Dad call me determined and Sticker Craw Mom refer to her only kid as stubborn. One of these sticker craw qualities let me leapfrog over second grade, and the other one got me kicked out of another private school and its frustrating as anything little kid soccer team here in town. You'll eventually guess the sticker craw of your choice. But for most of us, this is first time in our baby boy lives that we have an unrelated adult as our soccer coach or any other kind of coach, for that matter.

That's you, Coach Andy, and you probably know that by now with the very warm mid-September sun setting on a late Sunday afternoon, and the mothers and fathers on the sidelines checking their watches and hoping to get home on time, mainly for the Chiefs' game tonight, but for some of us to catch the rest of the Cowboys contest in the 3:30 P.M. timeslot.

And there's still hope for you, Coach! As we all caught our breaths after chasing the dandelion balls that were way faster than we were—instead of the soccer balls that were the whole point of this practice--I found out the names of the rest of us second and third-graders, since you finally remembered to do that.

Let's see. There's me, Jimmy, and Carlos and Will, DeAndre and Fillipo, Craig and Manuel, Tim and Tomtom, Heath and Joe, and Ken and Gary. I remembered them all, how about you, Coach Andy?

I think we'll all like each other out here!

I like you too, Coach.

Lord, it's me again.

I heroically and valiantly proclaim my witness to your true faith here and now, in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

I see you, as I genuflect on two knees and not just one, and as I kneel in silent prayer for an hour a day, every day, just as I always have, in the sight of you, adored, vulnerable, and exposed in stark humility, since my sixth birthday with my father and mother, immersed in our family's home school of the universal faith, here in this first hour of the day.

To be precise, my dear Lord, the clock on the back wall of our parish adoration chapel says 6:00 A.M. and not Midnight here in the Central Time Zone. But this is really and truly *my* first hour of every day, before breakfast or work or much of anything else in my own life, as your presence is really and truly here, presented in unleavened bread, and surrounded by gold in a monstrance.

You know me and a lot of the world knows me as Andy Founder. This is the first, first hour of the day, that a group of little boys that is more like "the gang that couldn't shoot straight" than a youth soccer team called me Coach Andy for the first time.

And Lord, this is the first time they will become my offering to you as my second family.

Just as you call me by name, Lord, you and I also call them by name: Jimmy, Carlos and Will, DeAndre and Fillipo, Craig and Manuel, Tim and Tomtom, Heath and Joe, and Ken and Gary. They are all your children, as I am your child, and as my beloved wife and spouse is your child. But I need to think about something else for a moment...

...When will I offer my *own* children to you, Lord, and call *them* your own? I am waiting, we are waiting as husband and wife, and we are waiting patiently.

I guess I also offer up a lot more Why, Lord? questions in this particular first hour. And I know, Lord, you have brought Jimmy, Carlos and Will, DeAndre and Fillipo, Craig and Manuel, Tim and Tomtom, Heath and Joe, and Ken and Gary into my life as seven and eight year olds, as they formally begin playing competitive soccer.

...Why this age, and why this level of competition, and why now?

Lord, I know and I appreciate my wife joining me in this effort of support as a team mom of sorts, and only a mother to be could laugh with other mothers as little kids fall on their hind ends while chasing a ball, even after five long years of calling her a mother to be and not an actual mother.

...The doing your will thing is not exactly clear to me now, Lord. I pray for understanding.

If your will for me at age ten was to make the Wichita United FC travel select Under 12s, being a premier kid on a premier club, how could I not be in the right place at the right time to return to them as a head coach? Do you not see a national Class A coaching badge displayed in my little home, in a modest den, and see how special and unique that was to be earned at only twenty-five years of age?

Does everything I accomplished for the Shockers at Wichita State—the degree *summa cum laude* and Phi Beta Kappa, the two-time honorable mention All American recognition at center half, the four-time second team *Academic* All American designation—count for anything now?

...I know, I do know, Lord, that the real job—the aviation job, here in this aviation city—provides most generously for me and my wife, and Lord, I'm so very grateful for that. But you know me by name, and you know my love for this game.

Should not your will for me be both the aviation job *and* the select coaching job?

How could it be that a native son of Wichita, Kansas—my beloved hometown—is continually passed up as a select coaching candidate by foreign players that've never, ever lived here before? How could this possibly happen, in my own backyard, across one select club, after another, after another?

Under 8 rec league? Is this really and truly your will for me, Lord?

The Mrs. thinks that it is without hesitation. "Of course it is, Andy," she says, "You know that and I know that, and the Lord surely has that in mind for you!"

Me, Lord? I'm not so sure, and so I come here, in this first hour of the day, like no other first hour of the day of my life, fearing compunction, hating compunction, yet desperately needing compunction, and, in fact, profoundly asking for this compunction in a role that I see as beneath me.

And I pray that I see the blessings as well as the burdens that are before me.

First, Lord, I do thank you for my wonderful full-time paying job. I thank you for the blessing of my wife, marriage, family, and home. With as much humility and compunction as I can possibly muster here and now, I thank you as well for Jimmy, Carlos and Will, DeAndre and Fillipo, Craig and Manuel, Tim and Tomtom, Heath and Joe, and Ken and Gary. May I be a Christ-like example as their first non-parental coach in a competitive sport. I especially pray that Jimmy surrenders his very stubborn nature and starts over after his rough first competitive soccer experience.

Competition. What is that now to me, Lord? Let me listen to you, if only for a moment, and pray without talking...

...Lord, could it be this, could it be your will and mine together, and could it bless a group of thirteen children and not curse them? If this is an aviation town, Lord, could we not fly our own path, with our own team name and motto? You and I know that will not turn ragamuffins into travel team select players, but Lord, can it provide them a flight path to something more, if I chose to keep them and coach them throughout the years of their boyhood?

...What about this name for us, Lord: FC Aviators? ...What about a team motto...?

Lord, would you honor our new team?...And would you honor this motto:

We're more than eagles, we soar even higher!

If it be your will, Lord, I now pray for *our* FC Aviators, for they are now also *your* FC Aviators. From this day forward, in this first hour of the day, before you exposed Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity in this Blessed Sacrament, I offer you Jimmy, Carlos and Will, DeAndre and Fillipo, Craig and Manuel, Tim and Tomtom, Heath and Joe, and Ken and Gary for your purpose and your plan...

... And as this first hour of the day concludes, I pray for my employer, manager, managing director, co-workers, and customers, thanking you, Lord, for the blessed gift of this job.

Last of all, I pray without ceasing for one more person to join me in the workforce this day, especially a needy man or woman, particularly a Veteran. that is homeless and hungry and in dire need, and whom may have no one to pray for them.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Carlos' Charity:

A Tiny Team Soars Forward



So, Coach Andy: You want our team name to be FC Aviators starting next fall, huh? What is that motto thing you have in mind, again? *We're more than eagles, we soar even higher!* Is that what you're talking about, El Señor?

The parents seem to like it. *Mi madre y mi padre* are on board.

But I really think that the new FC Aviators team name needs to pass the Tomtom test.

I see him nodding his head with a big fat grin on his little blonde-haired, bounce-around face. His real name, oh that is Tomas, *por supuesto*. He moves so fast on our front line right there in the middle, nobody can keep up with *este amigo*. Tom here, Tom there, Tom everywhere—that's why we call him Tomtom, *porque* he's always in two places at once! *Si*, that Tomtom *vaquero*, he's usually *no el gordo para nada*. The rest of us think *el nombre* FC Aviators *es muy excelente, verdad?*

Oh no, oh no! Carlos is in big trouble, again—big, *big* trouble!

Coach, let me tell you why, and please don't worry, the huge scrape on my thigh after that last slide tackle at right fullback isn't bleeding, and you know that I totally and completely *hate* ripping off those bandages.

Yes, I mentioned trouble. Stay with me, now, it's a habit and habits are not easy to break.

When I went on and on about our team name and motto and Tomtom just now, that was my habit. You see, I now live surrounded by English, but I still think in Spanish, and sometimes what I think is what I speak. That could be why you saw both my mom and my dad—and my grandma, who came out to see me play today, too—all of three of them stood up, hands on hips, and gave me that look.

Coach Andy, you are the very best, and I want to give you the very best, too!

For my mom and dad and grandma—and my grandpa, too, he’s at home today watching a Liga MX match from the Yucatan—it’s what that look means that really matters.

It’s the “you’re an American now” look. The “speak English, and speak English well in public” look. The “be proud of your past, and just as proud of your future” look. I give them the “look who’s talking” look at home when they switch from English to Spanish when they don’t want me to understand what they’re talking about on the phone, but that don’t count for me or my two younger brothers.

Now I know you know what I mean here, Coach. But the look means I have to start over, in English, to get this right.

Here it goes, and simple is better.

I like the new team name. I like the new team motto. Tomtom likes both, too. And I get it: Tomtom sounds better than TomasTomas—uh, oh, there’s that look again!

Can we stop talking about our future name and motto? Yes, thank you, Coach Andy!

You want to know when we came to the US from Mexico? Well, I was born there, near Mexico City, in fact, and we followed all the rules in America and could not all come here until I was around five years old. My middle brother Felipe was born a year after me in Mexico—he’s right over there and a good fullback like me, see all those bruises on his shins—and Ernesto came into the world four years after that, right here in Wichita at Via Christi Hospital. Ernesto is the little guy on grandma’s lap who never stays put.

Coach Andy, I don’t really know how this works, so I will just tell you. My folks will admit this is quite an English challenge! What I am trying to say is...what exactly?

I see you kneeling down at my eye level, and I hear you replying, “Just take your time, Carlos.” I’m trying to say, is this right, your birthday determines when you enter school?

You say that is good? OK, Coach Andy.

Well, mine is October the first. The State of Kansas says I have to be born by August 31 to be in kindergarten. So, I waited a year. That makes me an older third grader. That OK, Coach Andy? Mom, dad, grandma, OK? OK.

Maybe that was good, being an October the first kid. For me, public school has been a very, *very* good thing! Coach Andy, do you know what a GT student is? That's me! A STEM student? That's me, too! Honors kid, you guessed that right again!

That grandma of mine over there, well, she calls me a very giving child. Me, I see someone who needs help, I give them help—why would I *not* give them help? That is what a fullback does in soccer, help his goalie. Dad thinks I take that way too far, he calls me, what is it, an overly aggressive player. Clean tackles but much too aggressive, dad says.

Think English, say English, Carlos!

Grandma also says I am very, what is the phrase, I am very popular. Is that why Tim, and Joe, and I think Gary, too, and maybe some others on the team, look at me that way? Grandma calls that jealousy. Coach Andy, is she looking at all the girls who giggle when they look at me behind my back, I just hate that, I really do! Or is it my grades, or simply who I am?

Oh, so it's just who I am, and I should just be who I am. I will, Coach Andy. But enough about me.

This is so amazing, we FC Aviators are! Not a win in the fall, and it's looking like we won't have a loss now in the spring. But there is something I don't understand, really there is a lot I don't understand, like all those dirty looks and all those giggles.

Coach Andy, what do you mean, and what do my mom and my dad mean by us playing under ten first level select next fall? Does that mean we won't and I won't be playing against my friends from school anymore? All these new words are, how do they put it, confusing.

Dad sometimes sits me down and asks me this: What if Coach Andy emigrated from Wichita, where he's lived his whole life, and moved down to Mexico City? He would be living in Spanish, but still thinking in English. Yes, I get it now.

So, what is this under ten first level select thing mean?

Oh, Coach Andy, it means a higher level of competition for us. Do you mean tougher teams? Yes, you do. Does that mean we won't win any more games anymore? No, you tell Carlos, but it does mean we will have to become better as a team to win.

And Coach Andy, since you are such a smart guy coach, you know my next question already! Why all that then when we are undefeated now? You have the answer already: We can never learn and never grow as a soccer team without better teams to play against.

Then you asked *me* a question! What if I my grades did not matter, and my teachers told me that I would repeat second grade, over and over again, for the rest of my life, so I could bring home the same perfect report card, quarter after quarter? I would say that is stupid—how could I learn anymore if I continue to learn the same thing?

Exactly, you tell me, Coach Andy! And that is how under ten first level select will help us as FC Aviators learn more about playing soccer, and grow more playing soccer together as a team.

Dad—and mom and grandma and grandpa, too—think we have learned quite a lot and grown quite a lot already. No wins in the fall, and nothing but wins in the spring. But all four of them believe there is much more than that.

For one thing, we all have a sense of what Coach Andy calls our roles. I start at right fullback, and I love it too much to play anywhere else, even if I am too aggressive! My teammates feel the same way, although two of them may not like being subs on the bench and playing only half of each game.

Jimmy is a really good right halfback. Determined but much too stubborn, grandpa says. There's that stubborn word again! Will is one of our two co-captains at right wing, and he can read the whole field but sometimes cannot figure himself out. Again, that's the grandpa talking here, and not me.

Now DeAndre plays center halfback—that was Coach Andy's position with the Shockers. A shocker is a scarecrow, right coach? Back in Mexico, every team goes by their club name, like Toluca and Monterrey. Anyway, DeAndre is very team focused, but he can lose sight of taking care of himself, like resting up and drinking more water after hard games on very hot days. And Fillipo? Faithful as faithful can be at left wing, yet he forgets to speak up in team huddles.

Craig is our left halfback, quiet and reserved to a fault, whatever that means. Manuel plays next to me in the back at center fullback, and he's the exact opposite of Craig. To the left of him, Tim is the FC Aviators' left fullback. He never, ever gives up on defense, and when our goalie Gary screws up, he never, ever lets him forget it!

And now we return to Tomtom, our center forward. Grandpa calls him courageous but foolhardy. I need to look up those two words, Coach Andy.

We have two subs on the team, and Heath is one of them at the forward and halfback positions. He'll do what Coach Andy says but lets fear get in his way much too often, but don't let him fool you when he dribbles through an open space on the field!

Our second co-captain Joe plays behind Tim, Manuel, and I at sweeper back. Grandpa thinks he dominates the position but does not know how to put himself in the other kids' cleats. That's another Coach Andy word: Empathy. And we can never forget our other sub at fullback and goalie, and that is Ken. He supports the team 100 percent but needs to learn how to make better decisions in goal and on defense.

So, who am I missing, Coach? Yes, that's Gary our starting goalie. What about him, grandpa? He's always got his mind turned on, it's the self-respect that he has to work on.

Coach Andy, that about covers it, and in perfect English, too! But what is this thing that I've heard about lately, what's it called, a home visit you had to make?

Is that a good thing, or is that a bad thing?

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

I offer to you, Jesus, here present on the altar, my work, my marriage, my very life, and now, your FC Aviators as well: Jimmy, Carlos and Will, DeAndre and Fillipo, Craig and Manuel, Tim and Tomtom, Heath and Joe, and Ken and Gary.

But on this particular day, my dear Lord, and in this first hour of the day for me, I especially offer this day, and the Mass intention for this morning since work prevents my attendance here at church, for Jimmy.

Please speak, for your Coach and his Coach are listening...

... Last night was the first time in my coaching life that I needed to visit a player live and unannounced at his house, with a serious situation at hand. In all of my years training and studying for my coaching licenses—US Soccer's national A, B, and C badges—player interventions were discussed. The curricula said they were sometimes needed.

But Lord, a theory on paper, and actually sitting down with the problem player, are two very different things. Lord God, please do not judge me as sinful for putting it this way, but a seven-year-old boy, in a recreational league, that receives three yellow cards in a four game span is a major problem, and it is a major problem for all of us.

Lord, you saw me and Jimmy and his father, and both of them had their heads down and their hands on their hips in great frustration after that final whistle. It was two games and two yellow cards in a row, and Lord, I had to do something. And I believed our problem was solved with no issues at the next game.

But from heaven, Lord, surely you saw the game after that, and his direct swing at the opposing left winger's knee.

Jimmy's cleats were clearly up, aimed right at that forward, his eyes were focused dead center on his knee, and the ball was only inches away from him and he certainly was not pursuing it. That other kid had to leave the game for good with a severe bruise and he was really moaning in pain. I later talked to their coach over the phone and learned of that kid's less than pleasant visit to the emergency room over at Wesley Medical Center until almost nine o'clock that night.

... Lord God, I surely get it that our Under 8 rec league referees are only teenagers that work part time with middle school linesmen, and for them, this is their weekend job versus the fast food place. Jimmy is still very fortunate—and in your real presence I will not use stronger language—but he is immensely lucky not to have received a red card that game for something that flagrant.

And dear Lord, I'm sorry, but if I was the ref of that game, Jimmy would have received more than a yellow card that afternoon, and I told him and his mother that in their own home. You saw me pray in their driveway before I went in, and I thank you, my dear Lord, for giving me these words to say to Jimmy:

"Son, you are a very good player, but your conduct on the field and during practice is completely unacceptable. I do not want to have another visit like this, with more serious consequences to come, and I expect your mom to go over this with your father, as difficult as your personal situation is.

"Jimmy, just what is going on here? Where do you get that stubborn streak of yours? How come so much of your team feels so frustrated with you?"

... Lord Jesus, is this what I signed up for?

I pray for these boys' purpose and plan, but what about mine? An entire week at the day job cannot equal the agitation that I see and feel around Jimmy, and other parents are talking to me and calling me at home about this as well.

Oh, Lord Jesus, when your holy priest offers his Mass for this child this morning, may Jimmy know directly and personally how very much he is loved by you. I also pray that Jimmy learns that he can come to all the people in his life—including me—for anything and everything that he needs, and that he can come to you without fear or hesitation. I can tell you what I think, Lord, but only you know Jimmy better than Jimmy knows himself.

... I thank you, Lord, for a successful spring season with the soon-to-be FC Aviators. May my witness to you, to both little boy believer and little boy non-believer, reflect our future team motto.

When we cry out *We're more than eagles, we soar even higher!* next fall, may they know that I want Jimmy, Carlos and Will, DeAndre and Fillipo, Craig and Manuel, Tim and Tomtom, Heath and Joe, and Ken and Gary to join me and my wife someday, if we are so worthy, to soar higher than earthly victory straight to heaven. FC Aviators is just a team, and only a means to that end.

.... Lord Jesus, we take the next step towards that ultimate goal as we pursue under ten first level select competition here in Wichita right after Labor Day. That will be more responsibility for me along with more duties after work at home.

I pray for the wisdom to be more than a conqueror for the challenges to come, especially as my wife returns to the workforce to reinforce our retirement savings. She is a Steubenville lady, as both of my parents were also Franciscan grads, and she cries out so fervently to be a mom, but Lord, we face what many others our age also face, and with both of my parents deceased and my five older siblings with families of their own, we have decisions to make and financial goals to attain, and nobody else will make those decisions nor achieve those goals except me and the Mrs.

The select coach I still long to be would financially benefit from their duties as a second job, and for many, quite a lucrative second job or even their only job. Lord, I simply give my time to these children with nothing else in return, so I beg you:

Please be the Lord of all our decisions, as husband and wife together in Holy Matrimony...

... And Lord, as far as Jimmy is concerned, and his own decision to remain a FC Aviator by virtue of his actions and responses, and not his reactions and stubborn rebelliousness—Lord, I will say an Act of Trust with my wife before bed for Jimmy this evening.

Otherwise, my God, you take care of this, and you take care of Jimmy.

As always, I pray in your real presence, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Down on two knees, and then up and off to work I go.

Will Keeps Giving and Freddie Flyer's Flying:

Growing Pains in Select



All I can say about this one, Coach Andy, is this:

Tomtom, are you really for real with that dog of yours? Thank goodness you didn't pick our new uniforms!

Now I must admit that when Coach worked with our folks to choose deep purple and lime green for FC Aviators' team colors, that one took a while for me to figure out—oops, sorry, Coach Andy! I get it now, though, and we all like the part about aviators being unique, so why should we be like everybody else and wear the same old blue or red jerseys and shorts?

That choice really paid off when we all saw our three new sets of uniforms for under ten first level select, oh, excuse me, they're called *kits* in international football, we stand corrected, Coach!

Us kids could not decide which *kits* we liked best: The white ones with deep purple and lime green side and shoulder stripes; the deep purple selections with white and lime green stripes; or, the *kits* guaranteed to make the other team cross-eyed, yeah, the *kits* that are brighter than bright lime green, with white and deep purple stripes!

At least this was simpler for Gary in goal, or for Ken when he backed Gary up: Both FC Aviator keepers went with silver (another eye-crossing color for the opposition in the penalty area), and I know, Coach, the shoulder and side stripes to their jerseys are deep purple, lime green, and white.

I also know this, Coach Andy: All of us went from knowing you, to liking you, and to adoring you, for this next decision. The idea of Coach leading us in eight and under recreational league soccer—and even this season, for under ten first level select—still seemed weird to our moms and dads. They called it this big word—overqualified. My dad's explained it to me three times and I still don't get it. I guess it means being really good at something and doing a job that does not require you to be so good.

But about that decision. And I haven't forgotten about you either, Tomtom!

Coach Andy knows soccer, and he knows the *kits* that players wear on *match* day (it's not game day for us anymore), and he knows the companies that make the *kits* or uniforms or whatever the heck you wanna call 'em. Some of the moms and dads found a great deal on what they wanted for their FC Aviators' sons.

Coach saw the company decal for those uniforms and said, "Absolutely not!"

"See that logo on those jerseys and the sides of those shorts?" Coach Andy told them. "Do you see what they represent about women, sitting back to back like that, without any clothes on? Is that the kind of young man you want your son to grow up to be? Is that the attitude you want them to have with their high school girlfriends on the night of their prom, or even at their first middle school dance? We may have to pay more for another uniform brand, but I will not coach your children if they wear this brand. Let's start this process all over again. Same colors, different uniform maker"

And so, that is what us FC Aviators did, and if you ask me, our second choice still looks really sharp out there on the field—in fact, even better than our first choice!

The moms and dads also respected Coach Andy for insisting on purchasing uniforms that were two sizes too big for us eight and nine year olds. We all got a big laugh when each of us seemed to drown in our jerseys and the shorts had to be pulled tight as tight can be so that nobody saw our underwear, but the uniforms would still fit us as we grew (even for our big guy Manuel at center fullback) so the Coach scored some goals—or some parent points—on that call, too, and even Freddie Flyer thought our *kits* were pretty cool, too.

Speaking of Freddie—yeah, Tomtom, that's all of your teammates staring at you now with a not so funny grin on their faces! Would you like to know why?

Yeah, Tomtom, I get it that you are the unofficial FC Aviators team jumping bean. I don't know exactly when you will learn that playing left wing, center forward, and right wing all at once is not the point out there. I know, I play right wing during most games, but that's not what I'm getting at, and is any of this sinking into that Tomtom, officially center forward, bouncy brain of yours?

And now there's this, this dog of all things!

Coach Andy, straighten this out for us, alright? Do we really need an official mascot—any kind of mascot—for this team of ours? Oh, so it will give us a real identity, huh? As in what exactly, the official field fertilizer supplier for our league? Give us all a break, Coach! It's our first season at this new level of competition, and do we really need Tomtom's dumb mutt to remind people that we are the one and only FC Aviators? Don't those lime green and deep purple *kits* we wear on the field do that already?

It's not enough that thing doesn't have a canine clue about how to stop barking. Did anyone get the memo about puppy dogs, especially the part about baby doggies—boy baby doggies—that don't know how to keep their clawing teeth out of everything?

Coach, you gotta know that includes my cleats, my socks, the handle of my water bottle, and don't forget that practice ball of mine, heck everyone else's practice ball, for that matter.

Your rules, not mine, Coach Andy: Every player on FC Aviators brings their own water and ball to every practice.

But about—the dog.

OK, I get the lovable and cute part. Did you notice how huge he is as a puppy? Are you totally sure he is just a baby boy doggy, Tomtom? You must know by now that the bigger the dog, the bigger the stuff that comes out of the dog.

No, I did not say that word, Fillipo, and I thought you were the sweet, kind player from FC Aviators at left wing, sure Fillipo!

All of this, all of it—and a border collie, too? Tomtom, stop bouncing around over there and tell me where you got this bright idea in the first place. Especially the super brilliant one about putting movie star sunglasses on the critter, covering him with a cape on the sidelines during games like he's the red baron, and calling him Freddie Flyer.

I understand, I've figured it out, and I think it's plain dumb, but whatever: Aviators, they fly, Freddie and Flyer go together, yessir, over and out. Plus, your dad went to college at Dayton and they are the Flyers, yeah, I'll deal with it if everyone else does.

Tomtom, this is all fine, my only comment now is this, how about it, Coach Andy:

If Freddie Flyer squats, Tomtom picks it up!

Don't all laugh at me and roll on the grass totally in stitches as if you don't know what a dog does! You see all those moms and dads with plastic bags around here. OK, fine, you all win, if a mascot brings us good luck in under ten first level select, ask me if I care if the wrong time or the wrong place comes our way. It just better not be on my cleats again, Tomtom!

You heard that, right Freddie Flyer? Yeah, I'm your best friend, too, oh, brother!

I understand, Coach Andy, yes indeed, I do. You named Will (that's me, at right wing) and Joe (at sweeper back) our FC Aviators' co-captains for a reason. We are all a year older than we were when chasing dandelion puffs made more sense than understanding why you chose a 4-3-3 formation for our team as the previous season took its course. Yes, Coach, I know by now that four plus three plus three does not equal eleven and does not include the goalie.

And, really? Give a kid a break, Coach: Yes, yes, the four is for the number of fullbacks and we count up to the front line, and not the other way around.

And I know this reminder is coming as well: Will, I need you to have your head in each game, both on the outside and on the inside.

You do remember I'm still eight, right Coach Andy? I appreciate what my father has told me from the beginning of us as a team, he ought to know as a former All-American winger for St. Louis University. That's the Billikens, Coach. Anyway, Dad always reminds me how fortunate we FC Aviators are for having you, Coach Andy.

But the head thing. What is that all about?

I see my head in the mirror, and everyone knows it's there above my neck. Coach Andy, I'm consistently talking to Jimmy behind me to pass the ball ahead of me, but to keep me onside. You must know that Tomtom and I have way too much to say on the front line when he tries to cover too much ground and do too much with the ball. DeAndre at center half and I are working very well together, and besides, he is super good about knowing when he needs to admit his own mistakes on the field. I try to do the same thing and own up when I need to own up.

So, Coach Andy, what exactly is the inside head part of all this?

Is that, like, the part of the game where I'm trying to do too much for everyone else and not enough for myself? Dad and you have talked before about everything I'm doing these days, the Catholic school second grade stuff, the top of the line grades, and how I'm involved in every activity under the sun along with this team. Everyone believes that for me to be in under ten first level select is simply unbelievable. Yeah, all the time my father thinks I'm the best leader on the team, but he also asks me again and again, "Will, when will you ever stand still?"

Coach, is that what you mean? About my head on the inside? This thing you call self-awareness? What's the word you keep saying about me?

Oh, it's focus, that's it.

You know that I'm in the middle of five kids at home, with two younger twin sisters and a pair of older brothers. They see how well I play out here, and sure, you do, too, Coach Andy. But you also see how I try to figure out my life and be my best out at right wing, all at the same time. Everybody in the family says the same thing you do, Coach: You can't completely take care of everyone else until you learn to take care of yourself.

That one is hard, Coach Andy. It was fun to be on an undefeated team last spring, and even with four losses and three ties so far this fall, it's still fun! The focus part is harder now but it's more important now. It's not so easy to win lately, and our practice sessions are also harder to prepare for all that.

I guess we do need Freddie Flyer, after all, to remind us how to smile every now and then, even when we play our very best and still lose very badly.

Dad and mom calls all these things growing pains. But I would rather be growing with you, Coach Andy, than with any other coach around, and I talk with my teammates about this sort of thing over the phone and at sleepovers.

They all feel the same way about you that I do.

Coach, can we talk some more about that focus thing before we wrap up tonight's practice? I know it's fall and there isn't that much daylight after school like there used to be in the summer here in Wichita, but this won't take long, I promise.

Lord, where do I start, oh, excuse me, Coach Andy, I hope you don't mind the Lord part of this.

You've seen my younger twin sisters, they're three years behind me. And sometimes, the older brother in high school can make it to our games when he doesn't have his own games to play at Bishop Carroll, yep, he's a winger like the rest of us are!

My other older brother? Well, that is the real focus problem, and I guess that is why you have not seen him cheer me on out here.

Coach Andy...yes, I'm OK, and this is not easy, these last two years.

You see, one night he was coming home from a dance at Carroll, and he tells me that he had the right of way on green going through a traffic light. Where that other car came from—why it was there—we may never know. They say the crash could be heard above the band back at Bishop Carroll inside the gym with the back doors open on that warm spring night.

It was a day or two later that the doctor told my mother and father the news...

The guy that hit him was really drunk, and my oldest brother would probably spend the rest of his life in a wheelchair.

Coach Andy, someday...can you tell me what a quadriplegic is? You'll pray for us, won't you? I know I should do that more, but the focus thing is not that easy. Maybe you will be our FC Aviators coach a long, *long* time, and teach us about those inside heads and outside heads.

I'm sorry, Coach...it's that can't stop crying when I think about my oldest brother. He's my biggest fan, and every Catholic college out there wanted him bad with scholarships and everything.

But...get your inside and outside heads together, that's what you say, Coach Andy!

I think Jimmy at right halfback is doing that, in fact, better than me lately. Just think, Dad sometimes calls me Mr. Everything with all my activities—and Jimmy is getting frustrated with me lately.

Do you ever get frustrated, Coach Andy? Does that ever happen to grownups?

These first hours of the day are coming way too quickly lately, Lord, but even with only four hours' sleep, I am here, and so are you, as you always have been, as you always are, and as you always will be, and I couldn't be more grateful...

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

... Jesus, where does the gratitude ever start, and when does it ever end?

I thank you, Lord, as always, for life's blessings, as hard as they are to see and touch and feel—and especially believe in—on far less sleep than what I need. I am grateful for twenty-five parents and guardians trusting in my moral and practical judgment for their children's uniforms.

...And yes, sweet Jesus, Tomtom's dog, our team's very own Freddie Flyer, is not everybody's buddy and pal on the team these days!

But most especially, Lord, I am thankful for the tremendous changes in Jimmy's life. You get all the glory for his transformation, Lord; I am just your messenger. For children this young, after all, belonging on a team can mean so much, and as we are doing fairly well in this next level of competition, I want Jimmy to be part of our FC Aviators' upward path.

Lord, I want to thank you personally for this one...sometimes with kids, they do things or change things because they are told, or due to being severely warned or even physically punished.

Jesus, you simply did your Father's will. Your own Dad didn't need to warn you to do His will or else.

That is what makes Jimmy's changes such a blessing, both to me and to his FC Aviators' teammates.

Yes, Lord, I had to make that visit over to his house, and yes, his mom had to relay things to Jimmy's dad under less than ideal circumstances. But I only had to explain things once to him, and I can't help but think that your almighty hand was on his little shoulders guiding him.

I surely know, Lord, that Jimmy's Guardian Angel had a little something to do with the situation, too.

...Lord, you see Jimmy now from heaven, and I suppose the stubborn Jimmy will always be there. There's much more of the determined Jimmy this season, granted there was one ref warning a week ago, but so far during our initial under ten first level select season, there's been no Jimmy yellow cards and no Jimmy red cards.

... Tim, Joe, and Gary now have my attention with four yellow cards among them over the last two matches, but I pray, Dear Lord, that they've gotten the message on the field. May I trust more in you, and through that trust, may I be more confident that they will not need to learn their lessons during more home visits.

... There is always something like that lately, Lord, but now it is all over my life.

It should not surprise me that at this level on the field, I would hear more voices; surely I heard them at this age with Wichita United. Jesus, as a coach I think I hear them more, with every second guess of every referee call by every dad and mom out there. I even feel our players and their discomfort with every parental yelling and shouting match.

... Lord, please do not misjudge me severely. These events alone are not bringing on the lost sleep.

I have to remember that I am also a working professional and a husband. That last blessing doesn't get the attention with you that it deserves, especially as my beloved wife takes on the added responsibilities of work herself.

Jesus, as a Catholic Man of God, lead me so that I may lead my household as the spiritual head of our Sacramental Union in Holy Matrimony.

And if you so will, Gracious Lord, grant us the blessing of children of our own.

... You may have noticed that the clock behind me here in the adoration chapel says 5:00 A.M. lately, and not 6:00 A.M., when I normally start my first hour of the day. Work takes time, and more and more time in recent weeks, for that matter. If more of my duties need immediate attention, and my coaching conflicts with the limited time that I do have, something has to give, and that something is sleep.

... Lord, Will's story about his older brother's tragic accident kept me awake last night, as did extra work, and as did the Mrs. needing two hours' time just to talk to me about *her* work. And, of course, Lord, the higher level of FC Aviators' competition needs my extra time at home on the administrative side of coaching, along with the many calls from our team mothers and fathers, including a much longer call last night from Will's dad.

... Lord Jesus, here before me, physically present in the host, you most beautifully present this promise to me: If I seek you, I will find you.

Well, I seek you now in more fatigue than I have known in quite a while, even more than after my away games with the Shockers and 7:30 A.M. early morning classes once our charter bus pulled into campus after 1 A.M. I pray for peace, strength, endurance, and mercy for everyone in my life, most of all for my spouse, and also for thirteen children who rely on me to guide this next phase of their soccer lives.

Jesus, you know my name. You call me by name. You know my wife's name and you call her by name. And though they are little in stature but big and so beautiful in heart, you surely know by name, and you call by name Jimmy, Carlos and Will, DeAndre and Fillipo, Craig and Manuel, Tim and Tomtom, Heath and Joe, and Ken and Gary.

I pray for each one of these children, and for all of their lives, in school, on the soccer field, and at home.

Finally and most earnestly, and in your name above all names, I pray for healing for Will's brother, and not just physically, but also for his ability and for his whole family's ability to totally and completely love and forgive the man who has changed their lives forever.

...And bring Will to self-awareness, Dear Jesus, and to know and love himself, so that, in turn, he may love and serve everyone else, most especially his afflicted older brother as their lives unfold together.

... Jesus, it is like the worship song I hear on Christian radio here in Wichita: I could without question sing of your boundless love forever.

But the clock on the back wall of our parish Adoration Chapel gives me only one hour, and that hour is over already. While I strive not to love the world, I must still live *in* this world, including at my occupation where I must go now at this very early hour.

For my needs, for my wife's needs, and for the needs of FC Aviators, but most of all, for the needs of the most desperate and lost in the whole world, that they all may be heard and heeded by your unfailing power...

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

The Holy Spirit Program Guide to

Wichita's Very Own FC Aviators!

JIMMY



Position:

Right Halfback

Featured Chapter:

Jimmy's Faithful Jousting: Their First Season Together

Voice of Season:

1

Level of Play:

Under 8

Rec League

+ *Holy Spirit Fruit* +
Faithfulness

CARLOS



Position:

Right Fullback

Featured Chapter:

Carlos' Charity: A Tiny Team Soars Forward

Voice of Season:

2

Level of Play:

Under 8

Rec League

+ **Holy Spirit Fruit** +
Charity

WILL



Positions:

Right Wing

and Offensive Team Co-Captain

Featured Chapter:

Will Keeps Giving And Freddie Flyer's Flying: Growing Pains in Select

Voice of Season:

3

Level of Play:

Under 10

First Level Select

***+ Holy Spirit Fruit +
Generosity***

DE ANDRE



Position:

Center Halfback

Featured Chapter:

DeAndre's Joy in the Storm: A Promising .500 Season

Voice of Season:

4

Level of Play:

Under 10

First Level Select

+ Holy Spirit Fruit +

Joy

FILLIPO



Position:

Left Wing

Featured Chapter:

Fillipo's Kindred Kindness: The Emergence of True Potential

Voice of Season:

5

Level of Play:

Under 10

First Level Select

+ Holy Spirit Fruit +

Kindness

CRAIG



Position:

Left Halfback

Featured Chapter:

Craig the Gentle Giant: A Lost Soul Leads Through Silence

Voice of Season:

6

Level of Play:

Under 10

First Level Select

+ **Holy Spirit Fruit** +
Gentleness

MANUEL



Position:

Center Fullback

Featured Chapter:

Manuel's Great Goodness: Tough Fun, Stepping High—and Stepping Low

Voice of Season:

7

Level of Play:

Under 12

Division 1 WRSA Elite

+ **Holy Spirit Fruit** +
Goodness

TIM



Position:

Left Fullback

Featured Chapter:

Terrific Tim Chases Relentless Goals: A Twin That's Down but Not Out

Voice of Season:

8

Level of Play:

Under 12

Division 2 WRSA Elite

***+ Holy Spirit Fruit +
Chastity***

TOMTOM



Position:

Center Forward

Featured Chapter:

Tomtom the Tiny Tornado: More Than an Undefeated Scoring Machine

Voice of Season:

9

Level of Play:

Under 12

Division 1 WRSA Elite

***+ Holy Spirit Fruit +
Modesty***

HEATH



Positions:

*Reserve Forward
and Reserve Halfback*

Featured Chapter:

Heath's Happiness: Self-Control with Rumblyings All Around

Voice of Season:

10

Level of Play:

*Under 12
Division 1 WRSA Elite*

+ **Holy Spirit Fruit** +
Self-Control

JOE



Positions:

Sweeper Back

and Defensive Team Co-Captain

Featured Chapter:

Joe's Jabbering and the Dallas Cup's Coming: FC Aviators Aim Higher

Voice of Season:

11

Level of Play:

Under 14

Division 1 WRSA Elite

+ *Holy Spirit Fruit* +
Patience

KEN



Positions:

*Reserve Fullback
and Backup Goalkeeper*

Featured Chapter:

Ken's Perplexed Peace—and FC Aviators' Not So Silent Surrender

Voice of Season:

12

Level of Play:

*Under 14
Division 1 WRSA Elite
and Dallas Cup*

*+ Holy Spirit Fruit +
Peace*

GARY



Position:

Goalkeeper

Featured Chapter:

Gary, Lost and Desperate in Goal: The Soaring Even Higher FC Aviator

Context:

Summer of Coach Andy's resignation

+ **Holy Spirit Fruit** +
Understanding

COACH ANDY



Position:

Head Coach

+ Holy Spirit Virtue +
Compunction

FREDDIE FLYER



Position:

Team Mascot

😊 Holy Spirit Identity 😊
Dogginess