

PRACTICE

Building Character Through Soccer



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Compassion:

Deep awareness of the suffering of another and doing something to help
Synonyms: mercy, kindness, empathy, benevolence

Compassion Story

On February 15, 2006, the Greece Athena (Rochester, NY) Boys Basketball team made national headlines when a random act of compassion led to an extraordinary sports feat. Jason McElwain and Jim Johnson have a unique relationship, and both are now authors and motivational speakers. Neither one knew at the time what that night would mean to their future or how it would change the rest of their lives. Jason McElwain was born with severe Autism, a debilitating condition primarily affecting behavior, and a love for basketball. His mother told of stories of him practicing hours on end shooting free throws without interruption.

Despite Jason's love for the sport, he never was able to play organized basketball for the school, as he was never selected through tryouts. That did not stop the coach, Jim Johnson, from naming him as student manager, and Jason embraced the role with great energy. Jason supported the team from the sidelines with fervor, encouraging players, raising his arms to get the crowd into the game, and helping the program in any way that Coach Jim Johnson asked him to. Coach Johnson had hoped to get his student manager into the game that night, Athena's home finale. After the team had built a substantial lead, he did just that. Jason entered the game and sunk a 3-pointer and the crowd on hand went wild. His teammates continued to feed him the ball and if that wasn't enough, he made five more 3-pointers, finished with 20 points and was the game's high scorer. Fellow student Marcus Luciano happened to film the game with an old VHS camcorder and the film made its way to the local news and was picked up by every network. Most in attendance and those watching the video, knew that they had witnessed something truly extraordinary. Both Jason and Jim were invited to be guests on CNN and Oprah and won an ESPY for best sports moment of the year. They also were invited to meet President George W. Bush, Magic Johnson, and Peyton Manning. President Bush has said that he cried when he watched the story.

Compassion is simply described as putting others needs before our own. The reward of such an action is not just for the recipient but can often be for the rest of us. Jim Johnson's loving faith in a teenage autistic student manager led to one of the most unbelievable and incredible sports performances in high school basketball history. Jason McElwain is a living example of what we are capable of when others show us confidence and compassion.

You can read more about this historic feat in Jason's book, "The Game of My Life" written with the help of co-author Daniel Paisner.

