

MICHAEL. Hi, Coach Don. Hello, team! Looking sharp!

DON. Well, look who's here! Our brand new assistant coach. We'd about given up on you, Mike.

MICHAEL. Sorry. I guess I'm just a few minutes late.

DON. Eleven, but who's counting? *(To MICHAEL's son.)* Just find a seat in the bleachers, Frank. Oops! You okay?

MICHAEL. He couldn't find his glasses. I got you a mocha latte, Don. Extra foam, didn't know how you like it. *(MICHAEL gives DON the coffee.)*

DON. Much appreciated, Mike! Since this isn't the ladies' sewing club I think I'll save it for later. *(DON tosses the coffee into the trash.)*

MICHAEL. Don't care for the mocha? Or was it the latte?

DON. Cards on the table, Mike, I like plain old American coffee. But thanks anyway. *(To the team.)* Hey, anybody from last year remember how many times former assistant coach Tony was late? That's right. Once. *(To MICHAEL.)* Tony's a policeman. One day, stopping a burglary, he got himself shot in the groin area. What a sickening, bloody mess. He was ten minutes late to practice that day. So as long as you have a good excuse, you won't hear a peep from me. What's your excuse, Assistant Coach Mike?

MICHAEL. It was really unbelievable traffic.

DON. Fair enough, can't be helped. Unless of course you allow enough time to get here. I'm just outlining bullet points of what the kids can expect. *(MICHAEL's cell phone rings.)*

MICHAEL. Uh-oh. I think I have to take this. *(MICHAEL turns away and talks quietly on the phone. DON turns to the team.)*

DON. Assistant Coach Mike is helping us out by demonstrating things we shouldn't ever do. Like be late or take calls. I know some of you kids have your own cell phones—God knows what your parents are thinking—a lot of people should never have kids, they don't take it seriously, they never say no, and gee, why is everyone on dope and pregnant and living off my tax dollars? My one rule is if I ever see you chatting on the phone, well, some of you from last year remember our little demonstration which proved that a cell phone doesn't have much of a chance against a Louisville Slugger. *(MICHAEL finishes his call.)* Everything copacetic, Assistant Coach Mike?

MICHAEL. Yes, thanks. My apologies. Had to put out a fire.

DON. Was it a real fire?

MICHAEL. Never again, Don. *(To the team.)* I guess I should introduce myself and say a few words. My name is Michael Johnson—

DON. You can call him Mike—

MICHAEL. Actually, I prefer Michael, but...whatever. You know when I was your age, I played in a great number of curling matches—

DON. Was that "curling," Mike?

MICHAEL. Yes, I spent part of my childhood in Canada—DON. Oh, I'm sorry to hear that.

MICHAEL. That's where curling is popular—not important, just hopefully interesting, fun information—but what is important, and the point I'd like to make, is—DON. Is "curling" where you push this rock along the ice and get out little brooms and try to make it stop?

MICHAEL. For the purposes of right now, yes, Don, the specific rules of curling aren't important. What I would like to say, briefly—

DON. "Briefly" is an excellent choice, Mike. Because the Pep Club is in the lobby tapping its feet and I'd like to whack a few ground balls at my kids—

MICHAEL. It's about competition. These curling matches were the most important thing in my life when I was ten years old. But I honestly don't remember who won. I remember playing. So what I want to say to you, with the benefit of hindsight and, well, "wisdom" might be overstating it, is this: the fun is in the playing, not the winning and the losing. That's what I hope you will take away from this experience and what you will treasure when you get to be my age. And I guarantee you this, people, win or lose, you will have one heckuva lot of fun!

DON. Thanks, Assistant Coach Mike, although I covered "fun" earlier, before you got here. Probably you were still stuck in that unbelievable traffic.

MICHAEL. *(to the team)*. One other thing, this whole enterprise is about you. So please, let us know, for example, what position you'd most enjoy playing—

DON. Assistant Coach Mikel! Great intro, interesting ideas, which I'd put in the "devil's advocate" category, and darn it, the Pep Club's at the door!

MICHAEL. That's about it from my end, gang. Let's play ball!

DON. *(to the back of the house)*. Hey, Pepsters! Can we have ten minutes? I know pep is important, but these children are the future, and yes, I know you have a permit! *(To MICHAEL)*. Mike, could you make yourself

useful and pack up our equipment, which, sadly, we didn't get to use? *(To the team)*. Okay, guys, that's it. Everybody goes home except you and you. Not you, you! *(MICHAEL starts packing the equipment—bats, balls, catcher's equipment, batting helmets—into a duffel bag. He can't get it all in.)*

MICHAEL. Are you sure everything fits into this bag, Don?

DON. Well, let's see, it did last year and the year before and the year before that...but maybe this year is different. *(Watches MICHAEL struggling with the equipment)*. Mike, would you be available for a coaches' meeting?

MICHAEL. Sure. When?

DON. Right now.

MICHAEL. Okay.

DON. Mike, you're not a baseball man, are you?

MICHAEL. To tell you the truth, I'm a bit of a late-comer—

DON. You got that right—

MICHAEL. But I've started to really enjoy the game.

DON. That's excellent. I have just one rule. You need to clear things through me before you go shouting them out willy-nilly to my team.

MICHAEL. What do you mean?

DON. I mean you can't be standing there as my assistant coach saying that winning doesn't matter. You just can't do that. Because that is bullshit.

MICHAEL. But that's how I feel. Look at the big picture, Don. Do you honestly remember who won and lost the games you played as a kid?

DON. When I was twelve I hit .456 with eighteen RBIs. We went 11 and 4 and we lost the championship game