

Dare to Make a Difference

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The school day was over, and my math teacher sent us off with one last homework assignment. Just then, a sudden announcement came over the speaker:

“Please excuse this interruption, this is just a reminder to all sixth-grade students to please sign up for an after-school activity. Thank you!” I walked out of the classroom, and grudgingly walked up to the board, where there was a crowd of many sixth graders. I knew most of their names, but chances were, they didn’t know me. I was the new kid at North-West Summerside Academy in Los Angeles, California, and the only people who’ve bothered to talk to me were Lillie Andrews and Lana Summers, two of the kindest girls I’ve ever met. They’re great friends, and we just started hanging out just a couple days ago. Lillie has shoulder-length hazelnut hair, crystal blue eyes, and rose-pink lips. Lana has long black hair that ends at her waist, but is usually in a ponytail, chocolate brown eyes, and tan skin. Out of the 2 of them, Lana is more straightforward and serious, while Lillie is funnier and more mischievous. Speaking of Lillie and Lana, they came rushing over to me.

“Casey, have you seen the sign-up sheets?” Lillie asked.

“No, I haven’t,” I replied.

“Well, it’s ridiculous! All the sports are only for boys!” Lana fumed.

“What?! That can’t be right!” I protested.

“Go and see for yourself,” Lillie offered. I walked up to the board and was shocked. Lillie and Lana were right! The options for boys were basketball, soccer, tennis, volleyball, and Running Club. The options for girls were Art Club, Writing Club, Reading Club, and Study Hall. I couldn’t believe my eyes!

“Have you guys tried talking to the principal about this?” I asked.

“No, we just saw it and came over to you,” Lillie replied. We decided that the principal definitely needs to hear about this. We marched to the office and walked up to the front desk.

“Excuse me, but can I just ask a quick question?” I asked. The lady at the desk peered at me with her half-open eyes, cherry red lipstick, and adjusted her mint green glasses.

“Yes?” She asked.

“Um, I’m just wondering why the after-school sports are only for boys,” I replied.

“Sorry kid, it is what it is,” She explained.

“Then, can I please talk to the principal?” I insisted.

“The principal isn’t free at the moment, and isn’t free for another 2 weeks,” She replied.

“Oh, I understand. Well, thanks anyways,” I uttered, disappointed. Lillie, Lana and I reluctantly signed up for the Writing Club, but we didn’t plan on giving up there. This wasn’t, “just how it is”, this is an old stereotype we shouldn’t move past!

“Do you guys want to head to the beach? The weather is great in California!” Lillie announced.

We nodded and headed to the locker room to change out of our pink skirts and blue shirts, also known as our school uniforms.

We walked to the beach and put down our stuff. The surface of the deep blue water shimmered as the calm waves splashed onto the shore. The beige sand was soft, and you couldn’t find a single rock in it. The deep green palm trees swayed with the breeze, and the wind blew softly. We picked up the volleyball to play a game. It was Lillie, Lana, and I on a team, and some other kids from a nearby high school on the opposing team. At some point in the game, the volleyball ended up low, and Lana expertly dived down to push the ball high enough for me to knock it over the net. At another point in the game, the volleyball did the opposite and flew further, so I ran over as fast as I could, and saved it. Near the end of the game, the ball went spiraling out of control, and somehow ended up in the ocean. Lillie dove into the deep blue waters and retrieved the ball in a matter of about fifteen seconds.

“Hey, Casey, Lillie, and Lana, was it? You guys are really talented at swimming, running, and volleyball. Have you guys ever considered joining a team?” One high school student inquired. We looked at the ground, kicking our feet around on the sand, sadly remembering how unfair our school could be.

“Oh, *I* get it. You girls go to North-West Summerside Academy, right?” Another student realized.

We nodded.

“I remember that school. I went to it a couple years ago, actually. It was required that all Grade Six students sign up for an after-school activity, and the sports were available only to boys,” The same high school student recalled.

“Well, anyways, it’s getting pretty late. Maybe we’ll see you girls again,” they said. We waved goodbye, and headed home ourselves.

The next morning, I sluggishly pulled myself out of bed, got changed into my school uniform. Today was the first day of our new after-school activities, and the first day of the boys getting all the sports. *Should I hold a protest? Or maybe flood the suggestion box?* I carefully deliberated ways to stand up for all the girls, but came to the conclusion that I shouldn't do anything drastic. I was the new kid, and the least I wanted was to land in a bunch of trouble. I swung my backpack over my shoulder and dragged myself to school, where I was greeted by Lana.

"Hi, how are you?" She asked.

"I'm fine, how are you?" I replied.

"Good, but I'm still a bit irritated that all the after-school sports clubs are for boys," She replied.

"I can't believe it! I got dragged into signing up for the Running Club!" We suddenly heard behind us. We turned around, and saw Anthony Sanchez complaining to his friend Rachel Anderson.

"What do you mean, you got dragged into it?! Us girls are stuck without any sports, right, Rachel?" Lana explained. I wouldn't really expect Rachel to complain about missing sports. During lunch, you can usually find her at table 7 with her laptop, typing nonstop.

"It's true, us girls don't have an option to play sports. But personally, I'm okay with that," Rachel replied, twirling her dark brown hair around her finger.

"All I want to do is take an hour after school to read without any interruption. But that's apparently not an option for boys," Anthony complained. Lillie soon arrived, lifting a huge box.

"I think I have a way to get everyone what they want. We should schedule an appointment with the principal and show him the evidence!" She suggested.

"Lillie, you know that the principal is a very busy man," Lana reminded her.

"Yes, I know, but shouldn't he have enough time to hear what his students have to say?" Lillie replied.

"What *do* my students have to say?" We heard behind us. We turned around to see Mr. Casandara.

"Seeing as this seems to be an important matter, why don't you step into my office? Brayden Stewart's appointment isn't in another thirty minutes, and classes start in fifteen minutes," He suggested.

We nodded, seeing this as a big opportunity. We walked into Mr. Casandara's office and started to discuss our problems.

"So, to sum it all up, we just want to do what makes us happy! The problem is, we can't really do what makes us happy because some of the clubs are for boys only or girls only. What we really want is for the clubs to be for all students, boys and girls alike!" I concluded.

"If all five of you are that unsatisfied with this system-" Mr. Casandara started.

"Actually, four people. I'm completely fine with this," Rachel interrupted.

"Well, if all *four* of you are unsatisfied, then we'll settle this debate the old-fashioned way, North-West Summerside Academy way. A game of beach volleyball. If the boys win, they get access to all after-school activities, if the girls win, the same rules apply," Mr. Casandara announced.

"Mr. Casandara, that isn't right. Why can't you just let everyone participate in what they truly want to do?" Lillie asked.

"This is the offer. Take it or leave it," Mr. Casandara insisted.

"I guess we'll take it. It's time this school changed," Lana replied.

"The game will be at 4:00 this Friday, on Sandy Shore Beach in front of the school. Have six players ready by then, all boys on a team, and all girls on a team," Mr. Casandara explained. The bell rang, and we walked out onto the hallway.

"We can do this. We've got 4 players already," Lillie encouraged us.

"Right, Rachel?" Lana asked, turning to Rachel.

"Of course! It may not make a huge difference to me, but it's time girls had a chance to shine! I'll even ask my friend Mackenzie if she wants to join, too. I'm sure she will, since she grew up by Sandy Shore Beach," Rachel replied.

"That's great, thanks a lot!" Lillie exclaimed.

"Anyways, we better get to class," Lana reminded us.

"I'll see you guys at lunch. Maybe on the way, try to find a final team member," I suggested. I headed to math class, where Chloe Saunders greeted me. She has blond hair that brushes her shoulders, crystal blue eyes, and magenta lips. She's usually shy, but also really funny and kind.

“Hi, I heard you guys talking about a beach volleyball game on Sandy Shore Beach. It’s pretty serious, isn’t it?” She asked. I nodded.

“Well, I was wondering if I could join your team. I’d give anything to play basketball at school!” She exclaimed.

“Sure. Meet me at lunch, table 3. We’ll talk this over with Lana, Rachel, maybe Mackenzie, and Lillie,” I replied.

“Okay, sure,” She smiled. A few hours passed by, and all I could think about was the game. I was really lucky I didn’t have a test, because I totally would have flunked it. Finally, lunch rolled around, and I met Lillie, Lana, Rachel, and Mackenzie at table 3. Mackenzie Gonzalez is mostly on social media, so it really surprised me that she actually played tennis. About halfway during lunch, Chloe finally showed up.

“I found our sixth member, Chloe!” I announced. We finished eating our lunch and decided to practice every day after school this week. It was Tuesday, so we had 3 practices to get ready. We also forgot to get backup players; in case someone gets injured. So, we got Amanda Hollister, Katie McDonald, Veronica Tuck, Sophia Williams, and Caitlin Hollister, who is Amanda’s twin sister, all who dream of one day making the volleyball team.

All week, we used all the time we had to practice our volleyball skills. Every single second we could practice, we did. Then Friday came, and unfortunately, we had a science test. I tried my best to focus, but I feel like I got at least four questions wrong. Can you really blame me? The game deciding if girls can have the same rights as boys was only 2 hours away. It would be impossible to think about something else.

Four o’ clock p.m. finally rolled in, and let’s just say we were pretty nervous. We formed a huddle for one last team chant and ran onto the court. The game went well, and the girls weren’t behind at any point. Rachel’s arm got injured halfway through the game when Diego Anderson, her twin brother, spiked it too hard. In two sets, the scores were almost tied, the boys’ team only having a one-point lead, with our team winning the second half and the boys’ team winning the first. The ball was blasting over the net, on our side. I called it and tried to hit it. I crouched down, used my knees to push upward, and... missed. Wait, what?! I missed it?! I missed it! That was the last point the boys’ team needed to get. We lost the game, and it was all my fault! While Lillie and Lana insisted it was fine, and that everyone misses hitting a ball, I knew that I ruined everything for all the girls in grade six. We shook hands with the boys to show good

sportsmanship and went home. I don't get why Mr. Casandara insisted on playing that game. Why couldn't he just let all clubs include all students? Was that too much to ask? Was it too much to ask for girls to be treated fairly? I was so mad at the school, but also at myself. If I had just hit that ball, we could all be playing the sports we wanted to.

After about 3 months of the sports season, there is an assembly in honour of the Running Club. Turns out, the Running Club broke a California record for the farthest run. All of grade six was there, sitting in the auditorium, and watching as each member of the club was called up and given a medal. I couldn't help but imagine what it would be like if things were different. If *I* was one of the players standing on that stage, receiving a medal for all my hard work, all the sweat that poured down my face. I guess all a girl can do is dream. Hope and wish for a chance to shine. Hope and wish for a difference.

"Trevor George, please come up and get your medal!" The coach announced. Ugh, I couldn't take it anymore. I bolted out of my seat and ran onto the stage.

"Hey, what are you-" The coach exclaimed. I walked up to the microphone and started speaking.

"First of all, I'm very sorry for interrupting this assembly, but I had to say something. I can't just let all the hopeful, talented girls in sixth grade hide their talent. If you want to do something, reach for the stars and make it happen. Boys shouldn't be the only ones who are allowed to play sports, because I know a lot of girls who have a lot of talent, who can play sports just as good as the guys. One must ask the question, if he can do it, why can't she?"

I explained.

"Miss Casey Mathews, I'd like to have a word with you after the assembly," Mr. Casandara said. I nodded. What was I thinking?! Getting up on stage and interrupting an assembly?! This is not what I wanted to be known for. The new kid who randomly runs up on stage during assemblies. They gave a few more players their medals, and we cleared out. Except for me, of course.

"Miss Casey Mathews, what you did earlier was not acceptable," Mr. Casandara started.

"Yes, sir, I know," I nodded.

"But it took courage all the same. I always knew you had it in you. You were the kid who could make a difference, and I was right," He said. "Of course, that means girls need to get their jerseys on," He added.

“Really?!” I asked in disbelief. Mr. Casandara nodded. “It’s true, getting up and interrupting an assembly is not an honourable thing, but standing up for justice is. I, along with the rest of the school, are inspired by you, the new student who fought for equal opportunities for girls and boys. I absolutely agree with everything in your speech,” He adds.

“It’s truly an honour to hear you say that,” I reply.

So, now you’ve heard the story of how I joined the Running Club, Lana joined the Volleyball Club, and Lillie joined the Swimming Club. So, what are you waiting for?

Go and dare to make a difference.