“Dedication”

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#soccer, coaching, disability, heartbreak

The boys would show up for practice just as the sun touched the field. Shadow-eyed and droopy, they’d let the soccer ball drop lazily onto the field. This kid would already be there.

Sitting in the bleachers he’d scream and wave as they kicked around the ball. He’d whoop and holler instructions to everybody on the field. He put more energy into the practice than the fans at the games.

He was a tough looking kid. I knew if I could get him on the field he’d tear from one end to the other without breaking a sweat. So one day after practice I ambled into the bleachers.

The kid watched me climb up the stairs. He nodded to me.

“Good morning Coach,” he said.

I grunted a reply and leaned against the handrail next to him.

Both of us stared at the field in silence.

“You’re a committed fan,” I began. “You ever thought about playing?”

His eyes lit up for a moment. “Lots of times,” he replied.

“You should join us at practice,” I said, hoping he’d get the hint.

He took a deep breath and glanced at his watch. He leaned behind him and picked up a steel crutch. Thrusting it under his arm he stood and adjusted the folded pant leg that ended at his left knee.

“I am, Coach,” he said. And he smiled.

The kid actually smiled.