

The Starters

"Girls, listen up," coach Doug began, "I want to tell you that you deserve to be here in this championship game. I don't care if the score is 9-0 or 3-2. I just want to know that you will do your best and have fun, understood?"

I nodded slowly, my insides twisting into a knot. I wiped my clammy hands on my shaking legs and blew out a slow breath to try and calm myself, it didn't work.

Sweat beaded on my upper lip, as the cool afternoon breeze blew wisps of my wavy blonde ponytail into my face.

Coach Doug stood up looking at each and everyone of us before he started again, "I have been thinking a while about this and I have finally picked the seven starters for this game."

I looked at the field and saw how the soft breeze ruffled the grass, how the white lines on the field sparkled in the afternoon sunlight. I looked at the goals, and all the moments I had scored as a starter and helped other people score came flooding back to me. I saw my first goal and I choked up, the shot was high and true from the corner of the penalty box, it was my first goal and our first victory.

When I looked at the field I remembered how the breeze would play with my hair before the game, when I stood at the top of the circle practically ruling the world. I remembered the feeling when I scored my first goal, and when I played my first game.

I remembered our first game like it was yesterday, I remembered how the rain fell soft and sweet like the tears in our small eyes as the rain heavily soaked our clothing. I remembered the end of the game when we sat down on the wet grass and heard all the things our coach had to tell us about how good we played and how much better we would get, but none of us really heard him in the soft thudding of rain on our head and legs. At that time in our soccer story we didn't realize that all we had to do to win games is to practice more and have confidence in ourselves.

When I looked at the field I saw every move, shot, pass, and dribble. I saw every time we won and every time we lost. We didn't just win together as a team we also lost as a team. A small realization formed in my head that soccer wasn't about winning, it was about doing your best and having fun.

A soft breeze ruffled the flags on the corners of the field and I knew that the game wouldn't wait for us forever. I blew out a slow breath wiped my hands on my shorts and held my head up just a little bit before I looked at Coach Doug to signal to him that I was ready because I knew that if I was scared of the field my teammates would be to and I had to show them that this game was meant for us to win. I glanced at Grace, one of my best friends and saw how nervous she was, I smiled at her and she smiled back, I saw some of the nerves fade off her face, and I realized that no matter if we won or lost I would walk off the field with my head held high and my shoulders back because I didn't come here to cry, I came here to smile.