

MOTIVATION - THE COACH LOU LITTLE STORY

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One of the most remarkable sports stories I enjoy telling from the platform is about a football coach by the name of Lou Little, who coached at Georgetown University before going on to become famous at Columbia University.

Coach Little had a big, strapping tackle on his team who was more like a teddy bear than a defensive tackle. In four years at Georgetown, the kid never missed a practice. In four years, he had nearly a 4.0 grade point ratio. And yet, in those four years, the kid never started, and the only time he ever got into the game was when Georgetown was 40 points ahead or 40 points behind.

Yet, Coach Little kept him on the team. He was a moral sparkplug, but he simply lacked the killer instinct that it takes to make it as a big time college tackle.

Four days before the last game of the young man's career, Coach Little received a telegram informing him that the young man's only living relative, his father, had died suddenly. It was Coach Lou Little who was asked to pass on the bad news to the boy.

"Son, I'm sorry to tell you that your dad died yesterday," said the Coach. "You're not a starter on our team and you won't be starting on Saturday. Why not go home and take care of matters with your dad? We'll see if we can win this one for you."

On the day of the big game, Coach Little was a little bit surprised to look up and see the young man standing there in the locker room. He had a look of an eagle in his eye. This was not the same tackle he had coached the previous four years.

The boy pleaded with him: "Coach, you've got to play me today. I've never asked you for a favor, but I need to get in the game today. Just one play."

"Son, you're not a starter. This game is for the championship," he explained.

"Just one play Coach," he begged. "One play is all I want. If I screw up, take me right out."

The coach thought about it for a moment. What harm could it do to put him in on the kickoff?

Georgetown won the toss and elected to defer to the second half, allowing the coach to put the kid on the field right away. The kick sailed two yards deep into the end zone. The receiver elected to run it out but only made it to the five yard line. Boom! The big strapping tackle greeted the kick receiver and dropped him in his tracks.

True to his word, the kid got up and ran off the field. Coach Little had kept his end of the bargain; now he would keep his. All he wanted was one play. As he ran off the field, Coach Little signaled for him to stay on the field.

On the first play from scrimmage, the opposing quarterback called an audible and handed the ball off to his big bruising fullback who dove off tackle on a trap play, aimed right at this young man. He fought

off the block, tossing the pulling guard to the ground. Boom! He greeted the 240 pound fullback and dropped him in his tracks. He hit him so hard that the kid was hauled off the field.

That afternoon saw that young man make 15 unassisted tackles. He made 12 assisted tackles. He caused one fumble and recovered another. The clincher was the pass that he intercepted and returned for Georgetown's winning touchdown. By any standards, that was a terrific year and he did it all in one afternoon.

When it was all over and done with and all the celebration had ended in the locker room, the only two remaining were Coach Little and the young man, standing there awkwardly looking at one another.

The coach said, "Son, I owe you an apology. I thought I was a pretty fair judge of character. Never have I seen you perform the way you performed today. Have I judged you so poorly?"

"Coach, you knew my dad died," the boy said. "You knew my dad was blind."

"Yes, I've seen you leading him around the campus when he used to visit you," said his coach.

"Today was the first time my daddy ever saw me play."

It does make a difference when those unseen eyes are watching.