

The Soccer Game

I was in an intense soccer game. No one who has ever watched a live game can doubt the intensity ~ the energy spent ~ the physical taxing ~ the mental anguish ~ all for chasing the ball.

Every time I connected and kicked the ball toward my goal, a large and imposing member of the opposite team would successfully block it and slam it behind me. After repeated blocks, I noticed the whole game kept shifting closer and closer to my home goal ~ where I definitely did not want it to go. Increasing my energy and focus, I would wallop that ball, only to see it blocked again and again.

I grew weary but kept pursuing, kept challenging and kept trying to intercept the ball. Still, it was obvious the other team was superior. They were larger, faster, more skillful in how they handled the ball. Moreover, and I was loathe to admit this, they cheated. They didn't mind striking players down who weren't even handling the ball. The field was often filled with downed players, scattered about, so even if there was an opportunity to pass the ball, rarely was anyone in position to receive it.

The officials seemed either to not notice the foul play, or not care. I grew more and more discouraged and wondered what the point was to continue playing ~ yet to quit seemed more devastating than to play.

After one particularly rough tackle, I lay on the ground, my face filled with sod. I absent-mindedly asked Jesus for strength to continue this lop-sided game. Suddenly, amazingly, there He was!

Dressed in full soccer uniform, clean, starched and pressed; He looked every inch regal. A headband gave Him a Nazarene look that drew a grin from my dismay. :^) Tossing a brand new soccer ball in His hand, He bounced it off one foot, then His back, then His hand.. and so on. He was ~ such a fantastic phenomenal player! He did such outstanding moves with that ball, I couldn't help wondering why; if He was such a good player, didn't He come help my team.

Abruptly, He stopped tossing the ball and looked directly at me. Eye to eye, He said these words,

"I've already played this game."

He cried out for the whole field to hear,

**"Don't you remember? Doesn't anyone on your team remember?
This game is over ~ and I won!"**

I saw clearly that the opposing team was Satan and his creatures. I saw my team as weary and nearly ~ needlessly ~ destroyed saints. I saw that the ball was really my mind and that the mighty kicks were what I chose to believe at any given moment. I understood then, that the truth drove the ball toward heaven's goal, while a lie kicked my mind back toward hell.

This jolted me to understanding. This had long since ceased to be a game of soccer. It was my life, my survival, my ability to walk in the Light of the King! I sat up then, ignoring the cries from both teams to get back to my position.

Slowly and deliberately, I brushed off my uniform, straightened my socks. Keeping my eyes on Jesus, I walked right through the turmoil of that violent game. Focused on Him and His victory, I easily ignored the shock and wonder of my team mates. **"Traitor!"** someone screamed. **"Coward!"** I kept my eyes on Jesus.

He smiled such a dear smile and then grinned as He flipped the ball behind Him,

"Don't fret. They'll call you worse than that before they're through, though I won that game as well."

We left the field and headed to the locker area. (I had much cleaning up to do.)

"The secret that you've just learned will get you out of every jam you might get in.

The secret is this ~ I've already won ALL the games..... and you, my dear, are on My team."

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Every time I connected and kicked the ball toward my goal, a large and imposing member of the opposite team would successfully block it and slam it behind me. After repeated blocks, I noticed the whole game kept shifting closer and closer to my home goal ~ where I definitely did not want it to go. Increasing my energy and focus, I would wallop that ball, only to see it blocked again and again.

I grew weary but kept pursuing, kept challenging and kept trying to intercept the ball. Still, it was obvious the other team was superior. They were larger, faster, more skillful in how they handled the ball. Moreover, and I was loathe to admit this, they cheated. They also didn't mind striking players who weren't even handling the ball, and so my field was often filled with downed players, scattered about. Even if there was an opportunity to pass the ball, there was often no one available to receive it.

The officials seemed either to not notice the foul play, or not care. I grew more and more discouraged and wondered what the point was to continue playing ~ yet to quit seemed more devastating than to play.

After one particularly rough tumble, I lay on the ground, my face filled with sod. Reality checked in as solidly as the dirt up my nose... no longer was this a sporting event. No longer was I

trying to make a goal or win a game. I glanced at my teammates, all in stages of fatigue and defeat.. and wondered if they knew the stakes had changed. , that we now played for survival.

I pushed against the ground, senses dulled by this awful knowledge and absently thought of asking

Jesus for strength to continue, or for wisdom to understand, or even for a new will to live. And suddenly, amazingly, there He was!

Out of place in His clean, full soccer uniform, starched and pressed; the headband around His forehead gave Him away. He looked so like a Nazarene that I had to grin. (Just to see Him switch my thinking from despair to humor.) Tossing a gleaming, new soccer ball with finesse, He bounced it off one foot, then His head, then a hand.. and so on. He was ~ such a fantastically professional soccer player! He did outstanding moves with that ball. In my head, still resting on the ground, I wondered why then, He didn't come help my team.

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