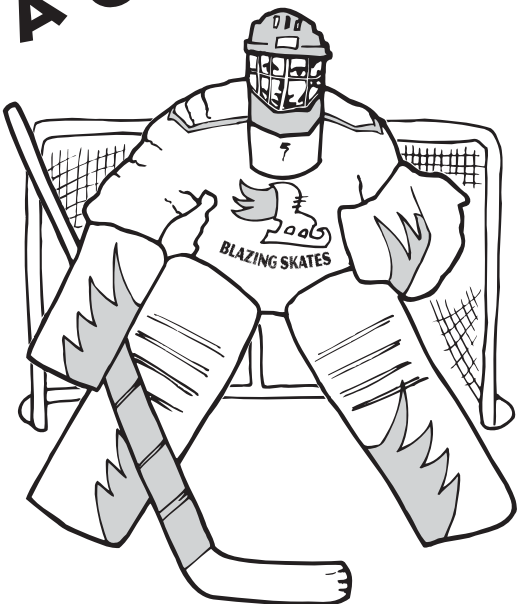


A Game to Remember



On February 18th, the Sault Blazing Skates were going to play in the final game of the city league hockey championships. The game was sold out and fans were waiting anxiously for the day to come. However, their anxiety and excitement were nothing compared to what the young players felt. The whole team was very nervous but confident they could win this game. Among this group of 12- and 13-year-olds was Tom Smith, the team's backup goaltender. Although he had participated in only a dozen games, he was an important player. Whenever he was called upon, he would deliver a strong performance. Of course, it was not easy to play second behind the best goalie in the league, but Tom accepted his role and his parents were very proud of him. Like the rest of his teammates, he could not wait for the game to start.

Two days before the important game, the coach held a final practice for the boys. It consisted mostly of power skating and touching up on special plays. However, both goalies wanted to warm up by facing a few shots from the forwards and defencemen. The coach reluctantly agreed to have a couple of shooting drills. He did not like to do this since there was always the risk of injuries. The players lined up at the blue line and took slap shots toward the net. Brian, the number one goaltender, was the first one to be tested. His skill and reflexes were amazing. He had completed the season with the best goals against average and the highest number of wins by any goalie in the league. His career seemed very promising even though he was still young. Steven, the team captain, was well known for his vicious slap shot. He wound up and took a shot towards the top left corner. However, his shot strayed a little low and hit Brian on the shoulder. You could have heard a pin drop when Brian fell to the ice. Everyone was staring. Finally, two players skated towards Brian to see if he was all right.

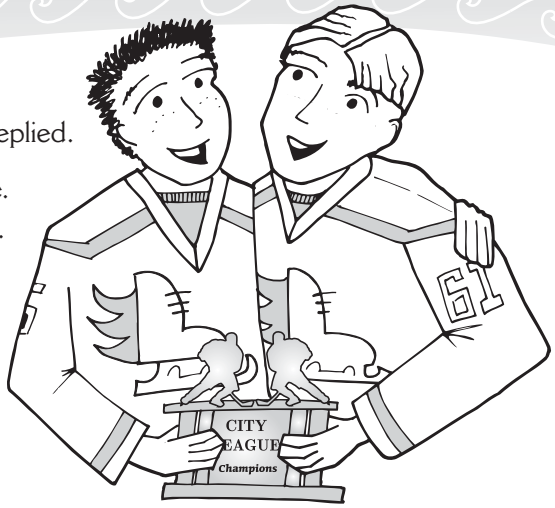
"Are you okay, Brian? Where does it hurt?" the first player asked.

"My shoulder, I think it's hurt pretty badly. The pain is brutal," Brian replied, fighting back tears.

Quickly, the coach and his assistants got Brian on his skates and took him slowly to the bench. There, the trainer examined his shoulder after taking the goalie's equipment off. He noticed right away it was severely bruised. Brian needed to go to the hospital to get his shoulder checked by a doctor. Practice was over. Later, in the dressing room, the panic was apparent on the players' faces and even in the coach's eyes. As for Tom, he felt terrible for Brian. However, deep inside, he was also frustrated to see that the team seemed to think victory was now impossible without Brian. He believed in himself and his goal tending skills, but he did not think that the others did.

"Maybe Brian will be okay. He might still play in the final game, guys," Tom said, trying to break the silence and cheer up his teammates.

"No! It's over. He will not be able to play. His shoulder was hurt pretty badly," a defenceman answered from the bench. "We don't have any chance of beating the Falcons now. They have one of the best offensive teams ever."



"We don't stand a chance without Brian, right? Thanks a lot," Tom replied.

Everyone was silent. Within the dressing room, the team spirit was gone. The coach had his work cut out for him to restore the team's confidence. He decided to give a little speech to the team.

"Hockey is a team sport, gentlemen," the coach said. "It can't be just one player who decides the fate of the game. The whole team is involved. If everyone plays together and sticks to the game plan, victory is ours . . . if you want it badly enough."

The players nodded their heads in agreement.

"Tom might not have played as many games as Brian," the coach continued, "but his goals against average is impressive. Tom has a winning record. I trust that he will play to the best of his abilities."

"You're right, coach," the defenceman said. "I know that Tom can do it."

"We have to do this for Brian," Tom added.

"Let's do it for the team. Brian will be there to cheer us on, I'm sure," the coach concluded.

The evening before the game, Tom was very nervous. The fact that his teammates believed in him made the pressure all the more unbearable. He started panicking. What if he did not play well? What if they lost the game? It would be his fault. People would probably say the outcome would have been different if Brian had played. Everyone would criticize his game. Then, he remembered the coach's words. It was a team sport. Everyone shared in the wins, everyone shared in the losses. No one was to blame; no one was to be singled out. Finally, Tom managed to fall asleep.

On the evening of the long-awaited game, the arena was packed. The Blazing Skates were tense and quiet in the dressing room. Then, Brian showed up. He had a broken collar bone, but he wanted to be with his teammates for this game. Tom was glad to see him.

"You can do it, Tom. Just watch the defencemen," Brian told his buddy. "They shoot the puck from the blue line all the time. If you can manage to make the first stop, our defencemen will take care of the rebounds. You can do it!"

"We can all do it. Right, boys?" Tom happily replied. "Let's go!"

The game started and it was an exciting match. The two best teams were in the final and both deserved to be there. The Falcons scored the first goal with only a couple of minutes left in the first period. Both teams came back strong during the second period, scoring one goal each. Tom was feeling the pressure when the third period started. After many tremendous plays, the final buzzer rang. The sticks went flying in the air, the helmets followed and the players jumped into each other's arms. They were screaming with joy. The championship was theirs. The final score was 4-3 for the Blazing Skates. Tom had stopped every shot after the Falcon's third goal early in the third period. The Blazing Skates had given everything they had to tie the game at 3-3, late in the third period. His defensive corps had helped him. It was a very close game with the Blazing Skates' winning goal scored in an empty net. The Skates won as a team. The captain, Steven, picked up the game puck and gave it to Tom. Then, he took the trophy and skated towards Brian. The injured goaltender held it up high. For everyone, it would be a game to remember. It was also an important lesson for Tom and the team. Keep on believing in yourself, and success will follow.