

## Count for Me, Dad!

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### Today's Treasure

*The Lord is close to the broken hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.  
Psalm 34:18*

Chuck and I joined the autumn ritual of cheering on our twinny grandchildren as they ran up and down the soccer fields, each one displaying their unique personalities in the way they chased the soccer ball and interacted with teammates. Our son-in-law coached from the sidelines with these words to his five-year-old twins, "This is the one place you don't have to share! You get to keep the ball all to yourself. If someone tries to take it away from you, don't stand back and say, 'OK, you can have it!'"

He laughed, looked at us and asked, "How do you teach sweet little ones that they must be selfish on the field?"

We switched fields to watch eight-year-old Benjamin. Benjamin resembled his Uncle Mark, especially his long-lashed blue eyes. The resemblance didn't stop there, though. Benjamin's job as goalie reminded me of Mark's goaltending career. Cheering on the outside, I privately pulled up the family videos archived in my heart. I smiled at the unforgettable scenes of our little guys, Daniel and Mark, running the beehive play (the one where every child on the field hovers around the soccer ball), Chuck and me yelling encouragement from the sidelines.

I quickly moved on to vignettes of Mark's growing sports prowess.

Mark was good at every sport he tried but sometimes his mind played tricks on his natural ability. Mark's Little League coaches depended on his big bat for home runs based on the first few games of hitting home runs. But Mark was just a little boy. Once he felt that pressure, instead of base hits and home runs, strikeouts reigned. As an athlete himself, Chuck knew the only thing standing between his son and good solid hits was a mental block.

The mental video continues to run.

And there in my mind, I see Chuck standing behind the backstop at home plate. He quietly talks Mark through each time at bat, giving calm step by step reminders of how

to do what Mark already knows how to do. I hold my breath with each swing and cheer wildly when Mark gets on base or hits a home run. Mark's smile while he runs the bases says everything. Precious memories.

That Big Foot - Mark was known in his soccer league as a great goalie. He had what his teammates called a big foot. He could kick a soccer ball halfway down the field and he was only twelve. So when he took up flag football, his coach assigned him the position of the kicker. Everyone anticipated winning the season because of Mark's extraordinary ability to kick the ball accurately and far. Much to everyone's dismay, Mark froze up toward the end of the season. The pressure to perform was too much and once again, a mental block stood between him and victory. At Mark's request, Chuck coached him every evening in the backyard, examining his performance and then patiently counting out his steps, "Left, right, left, kick!" Every time Mark listened, the ball soared and there was that big grin again, turning his anxious face into one of relief, confidence, and hope.

The football season ended with championship games preceded by a kicking contest. Mark's Big Foot made him the natural choice to represent his team. As we stood on the sidelines, we recognized the fear and watched his body freeze. What to do? We knew he could not kick the ball successfully without his dad's help. But we didn't want to embarrass him by calling out the necessary encouragement he needed. Mark practiced a few runs toward the ball, each time stopping short. He glanced our way but in his typical reticent manner, he did not ask for help. How could a 12-year-old boy embarrass himself by asking Daddy for help?

Mark's first two attempts in the contest were disappointing. His teammates and coaches held their breath as Mark set up for his third run at the ball. I prayed my mommy prayer, "Lord, please, energize that Big Foot!" I didn't care if he won, I just wanted him to do what he was able. Without looking at his father, eyes fixed straight ahead, Mark quietly spoke, "Dad, count for me." Without a second's hesitation, Chuck called out the count-down, "Left foot, right foot, left foot, KICK!" keeping time with Mark's run toward the ball. Boom, the football soared into the air. There was that joyful smile again and the fans yelled as his teammates rushed toward our son, knowing he had just won the kicking contest.

### **LIFE-GIVING ENCOURAGEMENT**

Sometimes we need a little help from our Daddy, but He knows it's best to wait until we know our need and we're ready to receive assistance. That morning Mark taught me the

value of humility, of admitting my need to the One Who is always ready to count for me, to whisper step by step instructions in my ear and to cheer me on to victory that is sure to come when I listen to Him. I'm so glad Mark asked his daddy to count for him.

Happy Father's Day, to Mark's Daddy here on earth! You're the best dad Mark could have had, and with you I look forward to that reunion, with our smiling son and with the perfect Abba Father, who always answers when we call His name.

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