The Longest Saturday (B2 · English B2)

Tekst / Transcript

Nobody in our town had ever seen a weekend quite like that one. The sports club had decided to organise three events on the same day, and the whole place felt like a small festival. There was a charity marathon in the morning, a five-a-side football competition in the afternoon, and an evening of screens, cables and shouting in the community hall. My brother Adam had signed up for all three, which everybody told him was madness.

The race started at seven, when the streets were still cool and grey. Adam ran the first thirty kilometres comfortably, but the final stretch nearly destroyed him. He crossed the line with his shirt soaked and his legs shaking, and he could barely lift his arm to wave at us. Our mother had brought a bag of oranges and a bottle of water, which she pressed into his hands before he had even stopped walking. A photographer took a picture of him with a huge silver balloon tied to his wrist, a decoration the organisers had given to every finisher.

By two o'clock he was somehow standing on the football pitch again. The tournament had been arranged so that eight teams played short matches, and the two best would meet in a final. Adam's team was not the strongest, but they defended well and the crowd loved them. In the second match, he made a sliding tackle that stopped the other side from scoring, although his shorts were green with grass afterwards. Ten minutes later, a defender pulled his shirt inside the area, and the referee pointed immediately to the spot.

Every spectator around the pitch stood up at once. Adam took the shot himself, sent the keeper the wrong way, and then lay flat on his back on the grass, laughing at the sky. His team lost the final on the last kick, but nobody seemed to mind. The penalty for arriving late to the final whistle, the organisers joked, was buying the first round of drinks.

We walked to the bar across the road, where the owner had put out sandwiches and enormous jugs of lemon water. Adam ate two plates of pasta and a salad, because his coach had always insisted on a balanced meal after hard exercise. He looked exhausted but completely happy. Basically, he told us, he had spent nine hours either running, kicking or falling over, and he regretted none of it.

The last event began at eight in the evening. The hall had been filled with monitors, and the gaming competition attracted teenagers from three neighbouring villages. Adam played one round, lost badly, and cheerfully handed his controller to a fourteen-year-old who destroyed everyone else. He sat in the corner with a cup of tea and watched. When we finally walked home after midnight, he said his legs would probably never forgive him, but that he would sign up again next year.

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