The Season Nobody Predicted (B2 · English B2)

Tekst / Transcript

When Maria took over the school football team, nobody expected much. The players were young, the equipment was old, and the previous coach had left in the middle of the season. Most parents assumed the team would simply survive until summer. Maria, however, had a different plan in mind. She told the players on the very first afternoon that they were going to accomplish something the school would remember for years.

At first, the training sessions were painful to watch. Passes went in the wrong direction, and two players collided during a simple exercise. Yet Maria noticed something in the way they refused to give up. One boy in particular, a quiet fifteen-year-old called Tomas, looked especially promising to her, because he stayed behind every evening to practise alone. She never shouted at her players when they failed. Instead she offered quiet praise whenever someone did something right, however small it was.

By November the team had won four matches in a row, and people in the town began to talk. The local newspaper sent a photographer, and the head teacher mentioned the results in the school assembly. For the first time, the players felt that their effort was getting some real recognition beyond their own families. Maria warned them not to get too comfortable. Winning a few games in autumn, she said, meant nothing if they collapsed in the spring.

The regional championship began in March, and the team travelled to the final round with a bus full of nervous parents. Their opponents were bigger, faster and better funded. Nobody in the stadium seriously believed the result was in doubt. What happened over the next ninety minutes, though, was genuinely extraordinary, and even the neutral spectators ended up on their feet. Tomas scored twice in the second half, and the defence held on until the final whistle. The performance was so outstanding that a scout from a professional club asked to speak with him afterwards.

When the journalists gathered around Maria, she immediately gave all the credit to the players themselves. She explained that she had only organised the training; the discipline and the courage had come entirely from them. Later that evening the school arranged a small celebration in the gym, with cheap cake and a homemade trophy. The players did not care that the reward was so modest. They had discovered something more valuable than a cup: the knowledge that ordinary people can achieve remarkable things when they refuse to accept other people's low expectations.

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