

# The exchange of tenderness

My son was devastated and I was feeling his pain. His Little League team had just suffered another agonizing loss and Wages made the final out. A called strike three at the knees. There's nothing fun about being 0-7.

"Let's go Dad," said Wages. "I want to leave right now."

I knew this was serious. Usually my resilient son is in no hurry to leave the ballpark. Win or lose, he'll beg to hang around so he can frolic freely around the grounds, chasing foul balls and playing wall ball with the other kids.

None of that was on his mind right now. As we walked to the car with my arm wrapped tenderly around his shoulders, I could tell that he was holding in his pain, and sensed that he was about to explode.

When we got in the car and closed the doors, the tears poured.

"I'm so tired of losing," he croaked in between sobs. "I can't stand it anymore. I was on a losing team last year, and again this year. I'm so mad I want to break something."

This was new territory for me. I had never seen him this upset after losing a game. I desperately wanted

to comfort him and make him feel better, but I stumbled for the right words. I thought about saying, "Win some, lose some, some rained out." I considered, "It's not whether you win or lose, but how you play the game."

But these sports clichés sounded hollow, so I quietly said, "You did your best, son. I'm proud of you. We'll get 'em next time. It will get better."

"No it won't!" he cried. "We haven't won a game all season. I'm tired of losing. I don't want to play baseball anymore!"

My 9-year-old son was sobbing so hard he could hardly catch his breath. My mind raced furiously. I had to fix this somehow. I reminded him of the two hard-hit singles he had in the early innings.

"I couldn't see the ball during that last at bat!" he gasped. "I lost it in the sun."

That was good enough for me. The sun was setting in centerfield and did make it difficult for hitters to pick up the baseball.

"The conditions were tough with the sun," I said. "It had to be hard to see the ball. But you stayed in there and battled, and did your best."

When we got home, Wages went to

the backyard and started throwing tennis balls up in the air and pounding them with his bat as hard as he could. He was letting off some steam. Sulking in the kitchen, I watched him from the window, considering my options for Daddy comes to the rescue.

And that is when I pulled out my ace in the hole. I had a church softball game that night at 9:30 p.m. I usually don't take him to late games on a school night, but this time I would make an exception. He needed the escape.

Plus, I figured he would get to see his dad play some stellar softball, our team would win, and that would certainly cheer him up.

Well, the game didn't go very well at all. The wheels came off in the third inning and our defense kicked and threw the ball around like the Bad News Bears. Plus, our bats were ice cold. We took a beating, 15-3.

Perhaps it was meant to be. Perhaps it was no coincidence that our softball team resembled my son's losing baseball team on this night. Perhaps some Higher Power was at work here.

At home, I tucked my son into bed



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and we exchanged our normal pleasantries.

"I love you," I said. "You're the best."

"I love you too," he said. "You're the best too."

As I made my way out of his bedroom, Wages stopped me with one last gentle comment. I guess he figured maybe I was a little down from our team's poor showing in softball.

"Well, Dad, you did your best," he said. "We'll get 'em next time."

"Yeah," I said. "We'll get 'em next time."

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