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WINNER on a Losing Team

BY SOLOMON McCULLUM

“Sorry,” said a big prisoner from the Indiana State Penitentiary as he looked at the hair in his hand, hair that had come from my head.

“No problem,” I assured him. It had been a rough game for everyone, but especially for me. I was the small forward on the Andrews University *Cardinals* men’s basketball team, and this particular day we were playing prisoners at the State Pen. The man I was supposed to guard was six-foot-nine and weighed around 250 pounds, while I was six-foot-three and just under 200 pounds.

I took my place at the foul line and the referee passed me the ball. It had been a rough season, too. Andrews is in the beginning stages of building a basketball team and those of us on it had endured some sacrifice. There were always class conflicts and scheduling problems. In addition, we all had to pay for our own uniforms and shoes. Because the program was so new, it lacked organization, and we lost a lot of games that season.

The first shot rattled out and the looks I received from my teammates reaffirmed that the feeling was mutual. We were all tired of running, and hearts were faint from the losing season. It was almost over, and we were trying to win one more game.

The second shot went in, and we played out the remaining 12 minutes. At the end of the game, one of the prisoners approached me.

“Hey man, can I have your headband?” he asked. His question startled me because I couldn’t imagine anyone wanting a sweaty headband. I had never thought to give it away, but he seemed eager to have it.

Each member of the team was wearing a headband with Isaiah 40:31 written on it. The

coach had given them to us before the game. Coach enjoys playing games like this because he sees them as a witnessing tool to reach people who don’t get to hear about the love of God. Sports evangelism is his specialty. The team hasn’t always had the right attitude about sports. Many of the guys used to be so driven to win that nothing else mattered.

Isaiah 40:31 says, “But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.” Lots of prisoners walked away wearing this verse on their foreheads, and carrying a copy of *Happiness Digest*, or one of the other books we brought with us to pass out. As we gave them away, we could see that even though we lost the game, we won their friendship. Their eyes lit up whenever we gave them a book or a headband.

Many times we are so focused on winning we don’t see what is really important. God does not have winners and losers. He will bless anyone who waits on Him for their strength; sharing that knowledge helps us fulfill His purpose.

Solomon McCullum is a senior at Andrews University and is majoring in religion and communication.

