

RISING GENERATIONS

THE UPPER ROOM

Amber, 100% All-Star by Patricia M. Burton

Swish!

Amber jogged toward the basket to retrieve the ball, then returned to the line painted on the driveway to finish her fifty foul shots. She dribbled three times, breathed, aimed, and shot again.

Swish! Straight through the hoop.

I am so ready, she thought. Tryouts for the exclusive basketball team, the All Stars, were next week. Amber had practiced for an hour almost every day since June. She knew the competition was fierce, and most of the spots would go to seventh and eighth graders. Not many sixth graders tried out, and few ever made the team. But Amber loved basketball, and she wanted—more than anything—to be an All-Star.

“Dinner time,” Mom called from the back door.

“Ten more shots, please?” Amber replied.

“Okay,” Mom came out and sat on the steps to watch as Amber sank eight of the ten shots.

“I’m proud of how hard you’re working,” Mom said a few minutes later as Amber carried the pasta to the table. “I’m sure you’ll make the team. But I saw Lindsay’s mom at the store today, and she said the All-Stars play on Sundays—sometimes on Sunday morning.”

Lindsay, an eighth-grader, was amazing—one of the few girls who had made the team in sixth grade. Amber knew she could learn a lot by playing with her.

“You know, we have a family rule about sports not coming before church,” said Dad.

“Yes, we do,” said Mom. “Amber, you know we didn’t let your brothers play hockey on Sunday mornings. You’ll have to miss the games that fall during church.”

“But, Mom,” said Amber, “Coach Miles says the All-Stars is a 100% commitment. You have to be at every game unless you’re really sick or something.”

“I’m not sure a sport is the kind of thing that needs a 100% commitment,” said Mom. “If that’s really what the coach expects, maybe you shouldn’t try out.”

“But I’ve been working on this for months! It’s really important to me. Can’t we bend the rules for a few Sundays?” Amber begged.

Dad shook his head. “Attending worship is the priority in this family. Maybe if I talk to the coach—”

“No!” said Amber. “I mean, going to church is important to me too! But please don’t talk to the coach. Just let me try out. If I make the team, then I’ll talk to him about the Sunday games.”

“Well, you’ve worked hard, and you deserve the chance to try out. If you’re willing to talk to the coach about not playing on Sunday mornings, I think it’s a good idea for you to handle it yourself,” said Mom. Dad nodded in agreement.

The next week flew by. Amber was busy with a science project for school, she slept over at her friend Danielle’s house on Friday night, and her Sunday school class sorted donations for the food bank on Saturday. Still, every day Amber spent at least an hour shooting baskets.

On the day of the tryouts, Amber was so nervous she could hardly eat. The girls ran, dribbled, went through some drills, and played a short scrimmage. The final test was ten shots from the foul line. Amber swished her first nine shots. The last shot rolled around the rim twice before going in.

“Excellent job, girls. I’ll call you all tonight,” Coach Miles said, as they left. Butterflies were still fluttering in Amber’s stomach, but she knew she had done well.

“Thank you, thank you!” Amber said over and over when Coach Miles called to tell her she had made the team. But she knew she had to talk to the coach about church.

“Coach, I have a little problem . . .” she started.

“Well, what did he say?” asked Mom, as Amber hung up the phone.

“He said he understood and he would see if he could arrange the schedule so none of the games are on Sunday mornings,” said Amber. “He said I had a God-given talent and he wanted me to be able to give 100%.”

“Great,” said Dad. “Our problem may be solved.”

“What he said got me thinking,” said Amber. “If basketball is my God-given talent, shouldn’t it be okay for me to play anytime, even during church? Mrs. Carmody taught us in Sunday school that God wants us to use the gifts God gave us.”

“Well, that’s sort of right.” Mom smiled. “We want to use our talents to honor God. Like me using my voice to sing in the choir and Mrs. Carmody using her gifts to teach Sunday school.”

“I guess skipping church to play basketball doesn’t really honor God, does it?” Amber sighed.

“No,” said Dad. “But asking the coach to change the game times so you won’t miss worship does honor God.”

Amber went to bed happy that she had made the team but still not knowing if she would be able to play.

The next night, Lindsay’s mom called to congratulate Amber on making the team, then talked to Amber’s mom about the two out-of-town weekend tournaments.

“Weekend tournaments!” said Mom after she hung up. “I didn’t know about those. It sounds like Coach Miles wants a 100% commitment from your family too. Are you sure this is what you want, Amber?”

“More than anything, Mom,” Amber said. She had to find a way to work around the Sunday morning games!



She should be able to use her God-given talent and worship God too!

On Friday night, Coach Miles stopped by to talk to Amber and her parents. “Amber, there’s practice tomorrow morning at 9. I want you there ready to give 100%. I was so impressed with your request that that I managed to get the regular game times changed. You know, I’ve had a few parents grumble before; but I’ve never had a player say she couldn’t play if it meant missing church. Unfortunately I can’t change the tournaments. Tournament games usually start later in the day on Sunday, but we will be out of town those two Sunday mornings. Do you think you could skip church just twice? You must be out of town once in a while on a Sunday morning, right?” he asked, looking at Mom and Dad. They smiled when Amber spoke up.

“When we’re out of town on Sunday, we find a church to go to. Maybe you’d like to go to church with us,” Amber said.

Coach Miles grinned. “That sounds like a good idea, Amber,” he said. “I’m happy to have you on the All-Stars. I can see that you know what it means to be 100% committed to something.”