

# The Final Minute



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# The Final Minute

When do you feel the most pressured when it comes to test taking? For me, it's the first and last test of the school year with the last test being way more stressful than the first. The final test could either make or break your grade. A lot of times it breaks it, in sports, it's a little similar. When you are playing each game, it determines the fate of the team's championship or your team losing, it can be stressful. I have been playing soccer from a young age, in fact, my mom was the one who got me into soccer.

She did that because she wanted me and my dad to have something we could bond about and for the longest time we did. We got along pretty well, but when my mom passed away a year and a half ago, it felt impossible for us to bond again. With my mom's passing, it was hard for me to play soccer because it reminded me of her. What made it even more difficult was that soccer was my outlet. When life at home gets bad, as soon as I'm on the field I feel free and you always have someone cheering you on. Whether you make a goal and it's the crowd cheering you on or it is your team.

For the longest time, it was my dad and I's plan for me to get a scholarship in soccer and I still hadn't gotten one so the pressure was on. Although trying my hardest since 1st grade to make my dad proud and make him smile it just never happened he is a person who never shows emotion no matter

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how successful you are. I remember 8th grade when I won the best soccer player of the state award and told my dad about it. He went on to say “you can get the best player in the country award if you tried hard enough.” It made me sad but it inspired me to keep pushing to make him proud. My dad never wanted me to get comfortable with my current status, he always knew there was more I could change and more I could achieve. Now looking back at it, it really helped me a lot to know things can be very hard and challenging while it also pushes you to your limits and makes you 3x better.

In my senior year of high school, I felt I was going to be team captain. I was the only senior, I won the best player in the state last year, and everyone on the team loved me. I was anxiously waiting for an email from my coach telling me I was captain. When the day of tryouts came I was hoping our coach was simply going to surprise me and announce it in front of everyone and hand me the captain jersey. When I walked in my heart dropped. I saw Muhammed, the guy who bullied me for years, standing next to the coach wearing the captain’s jersey. My immediate reaction was to cry out and scream how Muhammed stole my jersey and I was the rightful captain but I knew I couldn’t. So I didn’t say anything and just clenched my jaw and went to stand by the other players waiting for tryouts.

During tryouts, Muhammed didn’t even acknowledge me so I thought he had somehow changed and I was in the clear, so after tryouts finished, Coach pulled me aside while everyone else went to locker rooms.

“Billy, I know I didn’t give you the team captaincy this year as you expected but I have a reason. I think you lack leadership unlike Muhammed, you are an amazing player don’t get me wrong, but it can still be your year if you make it. We will have college scouts attending our games throughout the year, so so I expect you to show up as the best version of yourself every time.”

“I will Coach. Don’t worry.” and headed to the locker rooms.

On my walk there I kept thinking about how much pressure there would be on me this year not only from my dad but also from my coach. It was quiet so I thought everyone had already headed home and I was alone. I put my headphones on and jammed out to my favorite music to relieve some of the pressure I felt. As I am reaching into my locker to pack my things the next thing away, I feel someone’s hand pushing my head against the bottom of my locker. I look back and to my surprise it’s Muhammed.

“You really think that you’re gonna steal my spotlight this year, huh Billy? I don’t know if you can tell but the team captain jersey is on my back, so looks like your season is off to a horrible start. Which is too bad for you but it sure does feel good to know you’re miserable.” Then Muhammed gave me one final shove and walked away.

I just sat on the floor holding back my tears, but as soon as I heard the door shut behind him I couldn’t hold it back anymore and started crying like a baby. The last time I felt so helpless in my life was when my mom passed away.

I went back to packing my stuff up and realized I had forgotten my water bottle on the field and went back out there when I saw Coach. I went up to him and said,

“Coach, you were wrong.” He looked back at me confused, “About what, Billy?”

“Muhammed isn’t the leader that you think he is. He was my bully growing up, and when I walked on the field today to see him wearing the team captain jersey it felt like he was taking away something that was mine. That really upset me. I went back to the locker room after tryouts and he pushed me to my locker and stood over me laughing and talking down to me.”

Coach looked at me like I just told him I believe in unicorns and leprechauns. I don’t think Coach had ever looked at me like I was the biggest liar before.

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“Billy, if Muhammed was that kind of person I think I would know. I think the problem is you’re jealous of him and you want to find any lie you can come up with to steal captaincy away from him. Billy, I need you to shape up and be on your best behavior and figure out a way to deal with it.”

I left the field so angry but just tried to keep it together because I didn’t want to prove Coach right. When I was walking home I just felt the same helpless feeling again that I had felt in the locker room. I was tired of it and I thought I couldn’t deal with Muhammed for the entire season nor did I think that I was ever going to have the opportunity to get a full-ride scholarship through soccer, so I made my decision.

As I walked in the door of my house, I saw my dad in the living room. He looked at me and said,

“How were tryouts?”

“Dad, I’m quitting soccer.”

“WHAT?!”

“Dad, listen I can’t do it anymore-”

“Are you crazy? What about our plan, are you just gonna throw it out?”

“Are you even going to ask me why?”

“Fine then. Why, Billy, why did you choose to throw your life away?”

“Because Muhammed, who has been my bully for my whole life, is now the team captain and he is going to make it incredibly hard to even get a college scout to even look in my direction. So, I ask you, what’s the point?”

“Billy, if this boy has been you’re bully and is still bullying you then it should give you all the motivation in the world to even work harder. In this family we don’t give up, okay? We don’t quit, we just keep working harder, you understand?”

“Okay baba, I will.”

I knew he wouldn’t understand so I didn’t put up a fight. I didn’t know if I should just wait till Muhammed bullies me



and until I have bruises all over my body or until I'm in the hospital for everyone to start believing me. I could instead, fake 'going to practice' and make sure that my dad doesn't find out somehow.

The clock that day somehow was moving really, really slow. When night hit and everyone was asleep, yet somehow I couldn't close my eyes and drift off to dreamland. I just kept staring at the ceiling and looking out my window thinking about how terrible my day went and what I was going to do to fix this all without disappointing someone.

"Billy, I know I told you this but you are a star, my love. A star student, a star player, and most importantly a star son. I love you very much and I know how hard it is to deal with what you are going through. It makes it even harder for you when you feel like no one is listening to you, but I promise you that you are not alone. You will soon get what you deserve in this life by not giving up no matter, who or what is in your way. No matter how long it takes. If you want it really bad, that's what you should focus on, my love. You just have to be patient. Billy, I know I left you and dad without saying goodbye, but he is right and you're going to have to forgive him for that. You shouldn't give up. If you do, then Muhammed wins and that's exactly what he wants. I think you know what to do. I love you no matter what."

When I opened up my eyes after hearing my mother for the first time since her passing. I felt like it was already going to be a great day and I finally understand what I need to do.

Because of my incident with Coach, I was a bench warmer for the first couple of games, and boy did that make Muhammed happy. To be honest, it didn't matter to me because I knew my time was coming, I just had to be patient.

So, at the next game, we were facing a team we had never beat and they were the reason why my high school hasn't gotten a championship in years. With that, there were

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some amazing college scouts in the stands. To add to that, Muhammed wasn't doing too well in this game. Coach was so mad at him, that in the second half of the game, he benched him. Then, Coach put me in the last 20 minutes of the game while the score was 1-2 and we were down by one goal.

Eventually, one of my teammates scored a goal with my assist with 10 minutes left on the clock and we were tied. We took a time out and Coach was giving us a pep talk like never before. Muhammed was begging for Coach to let him back in the game and Coach was so mad at him that he ignored Muhammed. I'm not gonna lie I laughed inside, but I did feel bad as Muhammed thought he could help the team win. So I swallowed my pride and did something I never thought I would do.

"Coach, I think you should let Muhammed in the game on one condition. If he will work with me like we are a team then he should join in."

"Muhammed, are you capable of that? Because so far Billy has been in the game for ten minutes and was able to assist with a goal and you couldn't even do that while being in the game in the first half." Coach said.

"Okay, I will. I promise" Muhammed told Coach. I could tell Muhammed didn't love the idea of working with me but he loved soccer more. As we were walking on the field Muhammed walked beside me and said to me,

"Billy, I know we haven't always seen eye to eye, but we really need to work together right now."

I nodded and took my place.

We had 10 minutes left. In the first 5 minutes, we didn't score a goal. But with 3 minutes left on the clock, we were finally making progress. As the seconds were counting down, Muhammed got a hold of the ball and brought it further down the field and passed it to me. Finally, I kicked the ball as hard as I could and the goalie threw himself at the opposite end

of the goalbox. The ball went in and I look up at the clock and it said 0. It was like everything went in slow motion after that. I saw Coach's face light up instantly and I looked at my dad in the stands. He had a big smile on his face and on top of that, he was also jumping up and down cheering for me. My team came running to me jumping up and down of how excited they were and even lifted me in the air. The crowd was cheering so loud, and it really felt amazing. I looked up at the sky and it was so beautiful and I felt my mom's presence like never before. After we finished up on the field, we went to the locker rooms and my dad followed. Coach made a speech on how amazing our team is and then thanked me for pulling through. To my surprise, right after the team gave me a round of applause, Muhammed stood up and said,

"Billy, you are an amazing person and an undeniably amazing player and I think for the longest time I was jealous of that and why I bullied and hurt you. But today I can't deny that anymore and I commend you for being a team player despite probably hating me. You put that aside and treated me like a team player and for that, I will be resigning from team captain and will give you that title because it is well deserved."

The whole team stood up and applauded and my dad too and Coach even said, "I agree, it is well deserved, and Billy I apologize for not picking you first, but forgive me by leading our team this season to the championship."

The team started cheering again and my dad came to me to give me a hug and told me,

"I am so proud of you my son, and I am sorry I didn't listen to you the first time. Ever since your mother passed away I forgot to take care of you because for the longest time that was what she did. But habibi I promise to be a better person and a better dad."

"Of course baba, I know you will."

As I was packing my stuff to get ready to go out to eat with the team to celebrate, one of the college scouts from UCLA

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(which is my dream school by the way) came up to me and told me,

“Today what you did out there was amazing, and I heard what

Muhammed said early and that is what we call a leader. To top that, we want to offer you a full ride because you are someone that we need at UCLA.”

“Wow, thank you so much! This has been my dream since I started playing soccer, you don't know how much this means to me.”

Well, that's my story of how I got here, and cheers to the next chapter of my life.

-Billy Amari