

An Important Race

Bobby Hanson stirred as the alarm clock went off. He rolled over, put the pillow over his head, and tried to go back to sleep. He didn't feel like getting up yet. Suddenly, Bobby remembered that today was going to be a special day—a different day, something he'd long been waiting for.

He leapt to his feet and put on his already laid-out track clothes. Down the hall in the bathroom, he washed his face, brushed his teeth, and combed his hair, thinking about the exciting event that would take place.

"Bobby, breakfast is ready," his mom called. "We need to get going soon, come on."

Bobby headed to the kitchen.

"Did you sleep well?" his mom asked.

"Boy, did I!" Bobby replied. He gobbled down the eggs, bacon, and fried potatoes that his mother had cooked for him.

"Bobby, when you're done and your bag is packed, your dad would like to talk to you. He's outside checking the car. He's hoping to catch a few minutes with you before we head off."

"Okay, Mom! Thanks for breakfast; it was great."

Bobby got his gear and then went outside where his dad was cleaning the trunk. "Good morning, Dad!"



“Hi, Bobby! Today’s the big day!” his dad said, as he stopped what he was doing and put his arm around his son. “You’ve worked hard, you’ve done everything you could to prepare well, and I imagine you’re a bit nervous.”

“Yes, I am a little nervous. ... I hope I do well today.”

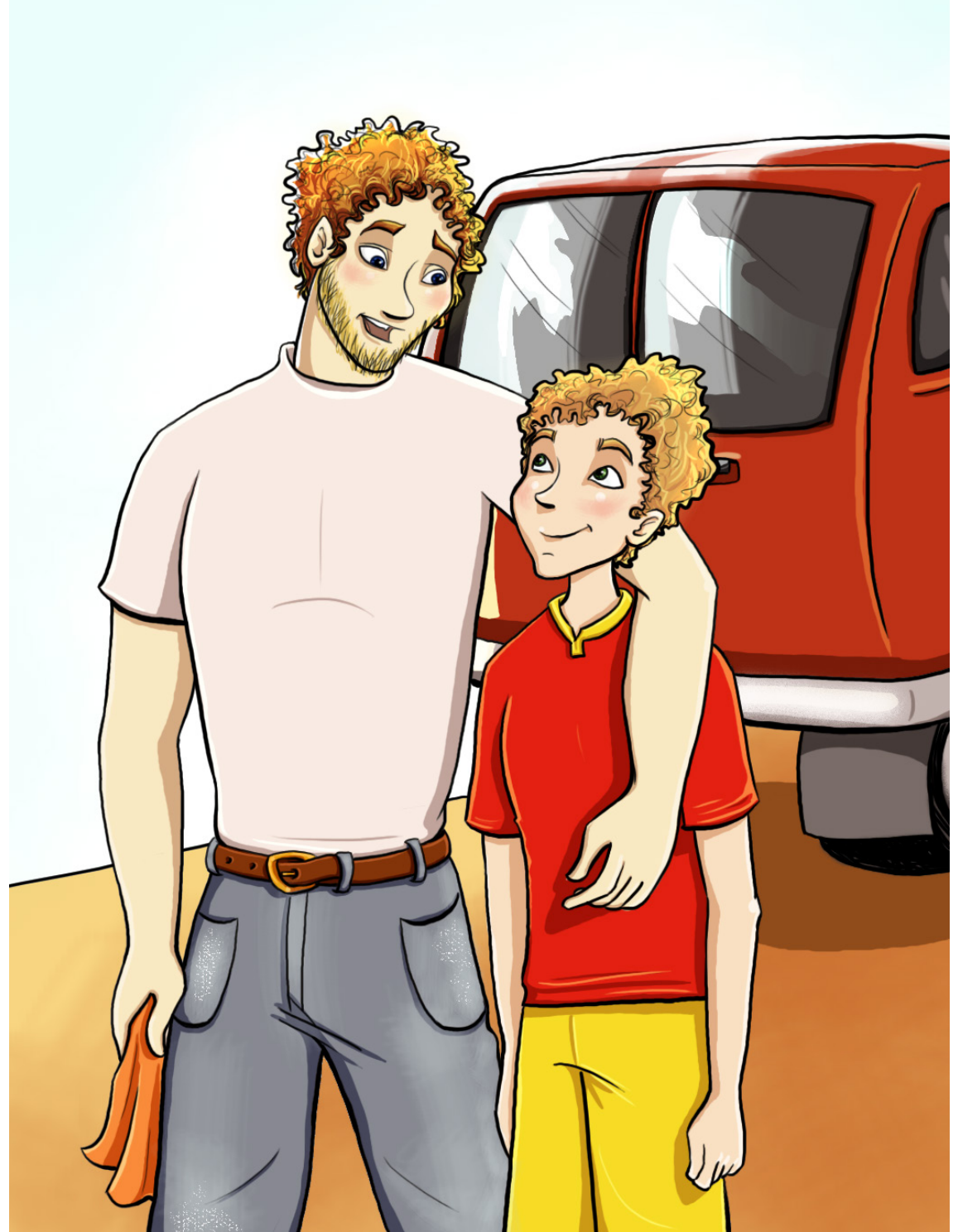
“Son, I’m very proud of you. I’ve watched you prepare for today, and you’ve done your best. So I want you to know that whatever happens out there, in my eyes, you’re already a winner. Don’t think that you have to win first place or else we’ll be disappointed. Of course we’re hoping that you’ll win, but the most important thing, Bobby, is that you’ve given it your best and you’ve persevered through the training.

“You’ll be facing stiff competition out there today. It’s not going to be easy, but your mom and I both want to let you know that we support you and love you. We admire all the hard work you’ve put into training, and whatever the outcome, we will be proud of you!”

Bobby was relieved to hear these encouraging words. He’d been worried about disappointing his parents, and he wasn’t sure if he could win the race.

As he jumped into the car, he thought, *What great parents I have!*

Bobby’s younger brother and sister piled into the car. Then came Mom, and off they drove.



It was the sixth grade sports competition for all the city grade schools. Bobby was part of the team selected from Riverside Grade School to run in the 200-meter dash.

Bobby was deep in thought on the way to the arena. He thought of the crowds that would be watching from the bleachers, including his family, friends, and teachers. With a lot of people rooting for him, he couldn't help but feel nervous, though he tried to keep in mind his dad's encouraging words.

The field and track events were being held at Riverside Community Park, close to his school. Bobby knew the place well; he had gone there many times to train. His dad often went with him, timing him with a stopwatch.

"Do you think you'll win, Bobby?" asked Daryl, his younger brother. "I'll be rooting for you. I think you're the fastest out there!"

"I guess we'll see, Daryl. I'll do my best, that's for sure!"

When they arrived at the sports grounds, Bobby said goodbye to his family as they went to find seats in the bleachers and he joined his team.

Coach Maverick had a few words to pass on to the boys before their events. "You've trained and worked hard," he told them. "You're a good team. We'll be participating in different competitions, but we're still a team."



“You’ve been chosen to represent Riverside, and a lot of people are watching. I imagine you boys feel pretty nervous. But right now I want you guys to forget about those who are watching, and about winning or losing. I just want you to enjoy yourselves, go out there, and give it your best!”

While Bobby adjusted his track shoes, he took a few moments to pray. *Dear Jesus, please help me to do my best and not to worry if I win or lose. Help me to not feel so nervous, and please help me not to disappoint my mom and dad, the school, the coach, and my buddies.*

As Bobby moved toward the starting blocks, he noticed that there was a big turnout—there were many people, and much excitement! People were cheering as the different competitions took place. It all seemed a bit overwhelming.

The announcer’s voice was heard over the loudspeakers: “And now, ladies and gentlemen, for the next event ... the 200-meter dash.”

That was Bobby’s cue. He got in the ready position and waited for the starting signal.

As he looked over at the seven other boys lined up to run the race, he began to think about how they were probably feeling like him—nervous and anxious, and badly wanting to win to please their family, friends, and schools. He shooed the thought from his mind. *I should be concentrating my thoughts on winning, not on how the other boys feel.* He shrugged and tried to focus on the race ahead.



The sports announcer's voice boomed across the field: "The 200-meter dash is about to begin."

At the sound of the starting shot, the boys dashed forward. Bobby had trained vigorously, and it was now paying off. He was strong and in good shape and was staying well ahead of the others—except for Stewart Davenport, who was running close beside him and seemed like he would be a tough one to beat. Stewart was a friend of his who attended another school. They had even trained together occasionally when they had the opportunity. The other boys followed steadily on, not too far behind the two leading boys, Bobby and Stewart.

Bobby could hear the people cheering from the crowds. Somehow he just had to get ahead. He had to win. Just then, right in the middle of the race, Stewart tripped and fell, while crying out in pain. Bobby flew forward, feeling shocked and sad for Stewart, who had been running so well and who seemed to have injured himself and was unable to get back on his feet.

Suddenly, what seemed to be a crazy thought entered Bobby's mind. *Go back and help Stewart.*

What? No way! thought Bobby. *I've worked hard for months! I'm not about to give up this race, certainly not on purpose. Everybody is watching—my family, my friends—the whole school is depending on me. That's crazy!*



But as Bobby ran on, the small voice that had spoken to him grew louder until it almost boomed in his ears, urging him to help Stewart. Bobby turned and ran back to Stewart, who was sitting on the ground rubbing his ankle. This made way for James Arnette to win the race. James was elated and the crowd cheered.

“Why’d you do that, man? You could’ve won!” Stewart asked.

“I don’t know. ... I just felt like I had to. I felt like it was the right thing to do,” Bobby replied.

“Thanks, Bobby. You’re a great buddy. I’ll never forget that you did that for me. I was so embarrassed when I fell, and at first it hurt like mad! It helped to have a friend there with me. You’re a great pal!”

That act of thoughtfulness by Bobby on the racetrack that day in sixth grade started a lifelong friendship between Bobby Hanson and Stewart Davenport. Bobby gained something much more valuable than *only* winning a race; he gained a special lifelong friend. Most everyone who attended the race agreed that Bobby had gained in essential qualities: the ones of generosity and unselfishness.

