



GOAL of a
LIFETIME

By Donald Smurthwaite

A few years ago, I coached a boys' soccer team. They were an amazing group of players—fast, agile, with the instinct of anticipating where the ball would or should go on the next kick. The players really clicked as a team. They breezed through the season with a perfect record, most of the games ending in lopsided scores.

One of my favorite players on the team was Matt. Matt was an exception to most of his teammates. He wasn't as skilled or naturally athletic as they were, but he played with a lot of heart. He developed a knack for playing defense. Matt wasn't a fast runner, but he had courage and the uncanny ability to get himself right in front of a player ready to shoot on goal. Matt stopped dozens of shots that season with almost every part of his body—feet, legs, stomach, chest, and, on one memorable shot, his face. Matt earned the nickname "The Wall" because it seemed like no opposing player could get the ball past him.

Matt had one dream for that season: he wanted to score a goal. Since he played defense, at the opposite end of the field from the opponents' net, he had little chance to score.

The last game of the season came and our team raced out to a quick and comfortable lead. As the

Matt "The Wall" achieved his goal, and so can you if you learn the lessons of his memorable moment.

match wore down, I called Matt over to the sideline and told him to play forward for the remainder of the game, a position where he'd have a better chance to score. With a confidence that surprised me, I told him, "Whenever their goalie has the ball, plant yourself in front of the box. Be in the right place at the right time and you'll get your goal today."

A few minutes later, one of our players kicked the ball on goal. The other team's goalkeeper stopped the shot, put the ball on the turf, and kicked the ball low and hard.

And Matt, true to his nature, got right in front of it.

The ball thudded into his chest and ricocheted past the shocked and flailing goalkeeper into the net. Matt's teammates and their parents exploded in cheers.

It wasn't pretty, but Matt got his goal. He couldn't have been more excited if he'd scored in a World Cup match.

I've often thought about Matt's extraordinary goal and the parallels between what happened on the soccer field that day and the way we choose to live. Here are six simple thoughts that have come from Matt's memorable moment.

If you're in the right place at the right time, good things will result.

Matt's goal wasn't sheer luck. He knew where he should be and what to do when the opportunity came. Blessings come to us when we're in the right place at the right time. Think of the "right places" in your life—at home, church, the temple, in service to others, or with friends in safe surroundings. When we put ourselves in the right places, it becomes much easier to receive guidance and blessings from God.

Friends cheer for each other.

Next to the thrill of seeing Matt score that day, the best memory is how his teammates reacted. They were genuinely happy for him. The cheers were never louder that season than when Matt sent the ball into the net. True friends find happiness in others' successes. It's a mark of maturity and selflessness when you're able to sincerely congratulate a friend, family member, acquaintance, or teammate who has done well.

Listen to trusted advice. Then follow it.

Matt readily accepted the instructions he received that day on the sideline. He could have easily ignored my advice or given a halfhearted effort. But he trusted my words and followed up. His willingness to do so resulted in a goal for him and a valuable lesson about listening to good counsel and acting on it.

Everyone has a place. Find yours. Then shine.

It was clear early in the season that Matt didn't possess the skill level of his teammates. But he figured out a way he could contribute, and he took his role seriously. He became an important part of our team. We relied on his defense and determination. He set a good example for the other players. Whether it's in your quorum or Young Women class, in school, around the community, among your friends, on a team, or participating in an extra-curricular activity, you can find a way to contribute. If you're not in a leadership or key position or are naturally quiet, it doesn't matter. You can still find your place and make a contribution in almost any situation. You don't need to be in the limelight to shine.

Perfection is not required, but doing your best is.

Young men and women often feel pressure and competition—from looking a certain way to getting top grades to making a team or landing a role in a school play. There's pressure to be perfect, or close to it. Matt's goal certainly was not pretty, but it didn't matter. What did matter is he achieved it, even if it came in less than a picture-perfect way. Heavenly Father and the Savior expect you to do your best, even if your efforts aren't perfect. If you do your share, They will increase your abilities and you'll be able to achieve your worthy goals.

Patience pays. So does persistence.

It was the last part of the last game of the season when Matt scored his goal. He spent many hours at practice and games, waiting patiently for his chance. He never gave up. So often in life, we want results and gratification now. When we think or act that way, we lose the opportunity to develop two valuable character traits: patience and persistence. No worthy goal—on the athletic field or elsewhere—was ever achieved without a measure of these two characteristics. It takes patience and persistence to be a good student, a true friend, a great missionary, an exceptional family member.

What took place on the soccer field that memorable afternoon? The obvious answer is that Matt got his goal. But it also included learning lessons about life that applied beyond the playing field.

I bumped into Matt a while ago, and it didn't take long for us to start reminiscing about his amazing goal. We both agreed that, while his goal was thrilling and something neither of us would ever forget, it was the lessons we learned about life that warm autumn day that mattered most. **NE**

The author lives in Idaho, USA.



Do **YOUR BEST.**

Be in the
Right **PLACE.**

CHEER for **YOUR FRIENDS.**

PATIENCE Pays.

Follow **TRUSTED ADVICE.**

Find **YOUR PLACE. Then SHINE.**