

# COME READY TO PLAY

*Just showing up  
isn't enough.*

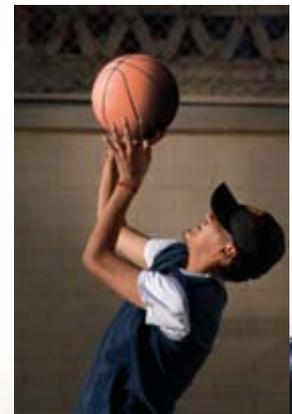
**B**asketball is one of the most important things in the life of Roger Enrique Velasquez Paredes, who goes by Koki because it's much easier to say when the clock is running down and the game is on the line.

Koki, a member of the Victoria Ward, Puno Peru Central Stake, is a starting forward on the Benson Jazz under-17 boys' team, a community league team sponsored by Church members in Puno, Peru. Koki's team went undefeated going into the championship game each of the last two seasons and took second both years.

His experience on the team has taught Koki not only a lot about basketball but also a lot about living the gospel and making seminary worthwhile.

"Seminary and basketball aren't so different," he says, then laughs. "I have to wake up early for both."

Joking aside, Koki *does* see some important similarities between the game he loves and the gospel he lives: you have to listen to the coach, apply what he's teaching, and not stop practicing what you've learned.



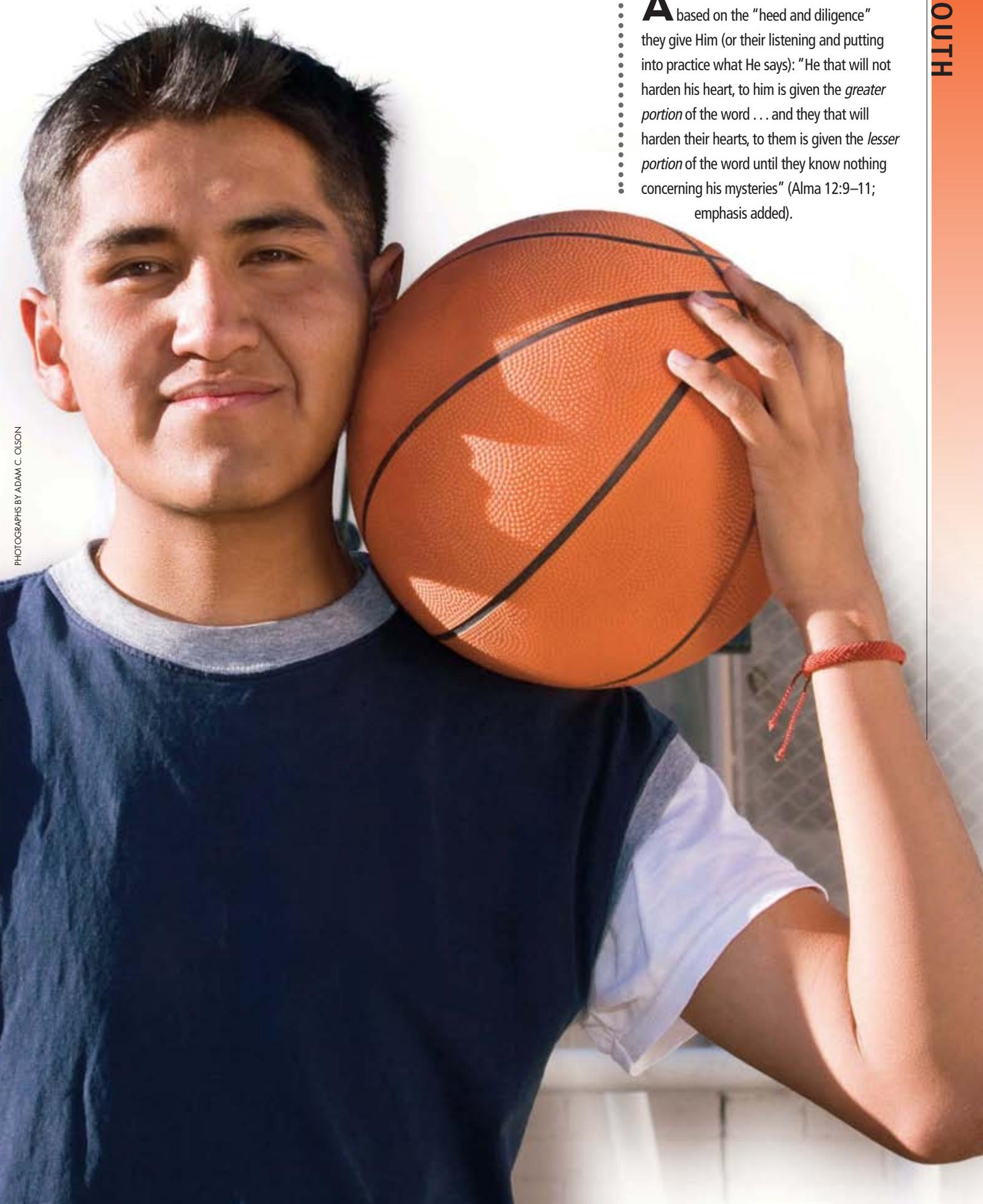
## Hearken unto Thy Coach

Koki says his coach is great, but it doesn't matter how good your coach is if you don't listen. Seminary is no different.

"In both basketball and seminary, I have a good coach," Koki says. "But if I don't listen, I don't get any better."

A coach tries to teach a player things that will make him or her better, like how to shoot. "The teacher is doing the same thing," Koki says. Among other things, teachers try to help students succeed against their opponent in life. "They try to teach us how to leave the world and strengthen us against temptation."

Alma taught that the Lord teaches people based on the “heed and diligence” they give Him (or their listening and putting into practice what He says): “He that will not harden his heart, to him is given the *greater portion* of the word . . . and they that will harden their hearts, to them is given the *lesser portion* of the word until they know nothing concerning his mysteries” (Alma 12:9–11; emphasis added).



Koki has learned that just showing up, whether in basketball practice or at seminary and church, isn't enough to make you better. You have to listen to the coach.

### Practice What Is Preached

Koki tries to listen while the coach is explaining something new. But he has learned that if he really wants to

opportunity to testify to us that the principle is true.

"If we learn something new but don't apply it, it's like we never really learned it," Koki says.

### Use It or Lose It

Koki listened when his coach taught about shooting, and he tried to apply what he learned. Now, in order

learn, we can learn more. If not, we lose what we have."

### Don't Give Up

Koki's teammates have done their best to listen to the coach and apply what he's taught them. They practice for hours to keep what they've learned.

They've also learned that after all of that, it is possible—and disappointing—to fall short of perfection. "We worked hard," Koki says. "It was discouraging to lose the championship again."

But while immediate perfection isn't guaranteed, it would be impossible if they gave up trying. In the meantime, Koki has seen that there are many rewards, including improvement and progress, that come from trying.

Koki, who is serving as a ward missionary, has seen rewards for being diligent off the court as well. He helped organize movie nights, campouts, and sports activities in order to interest two young men in his ward who hadn't attended church for some time. "At first we'd have to go get them, or they wouldn't come," he says. "Now they come on their own. It took a little time and a lot of visits, but they're coming regularly now."

Between playing basketball, going to seminary, and serving in the Church, Koki is learning what King Benjamin meant when he said we must be diligent to "win the prize" (Mosiah 4:27).

He's also learning that both on the court and off, the rewards are worth the work. ■



understand what the coach is saying, he'll have to put it into practice.

Putting something into practice, or applying it, is an important part of learning, Koki says. A coach can talk all day long about good shooting form and even demonstrate over and over, but until you practice doing what he says, you won't have learned how to do it yourself.

"That's how I learned about prayer," Koki says. He had been taught that consistent personal prayer would invite the Lord's help. "But it was only after I tried it that I found it was true."

Putting gospel principles into practice gives the Holy Ghost an

to improve, Koki has to be diligent in practicing.

Diligence means dedication or persistence in applying what you've learned even in the face of opposition.

"I have to be dedicated," Koki says. "If I stop training, my skills will get rusty."

That's an important lesson he learned after he couldn't practice for a while because he broke his nose in a rough pickup game with some older players.

"If we don't practice, we don't just stop progressing—we lose ground," Koki says. "It's the same spiritually. If we pay attention and apply what we