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THE LAST TALK

Lead Focused / Dramedy / 4-5 min
Cast 3-4 Female x1 Male x3

Coach Halvorsen is retiring after thirty-four seasons and tonight is his last game. He has written his final locker room speech down for the first time in his life. He brought the wrong piece of paper, and the clock is running.

CHARACTERS

COACH ED HALVORSEN (LEAD) - 60s, high school basketball coach for thirty-four seasons, retiring tonight, has never once said what he means.

JO - 30s, assistant coach, taking over next season, holds the clipboard and the clock.

DESHAWN - 17, senior captain, earnest, has practiced his goodbye in the mirror.

TOBY - 16, junior, sixth man, cannot stop talking. Can be cut, with his lines given to Deshawn.

SETTING

A high school locker room, eight minutes before tip-off of the final home game of the season.

A high school locker room. Benches. A whiteboard with a play half drawn. COACH HALVORSEN stands with a folded sheet of paper. JO holds a clipboard and keeps glancing at the door. DESHAWN and TOBY sit, laced up, ready.

COACH

All right. Sit up. This is my last one of these, so I wrote it down, which I have never done. So if it's bad, blame the paper.

He unfolds it. Reads. Stops.

COACH

This is the toast for my niece's wedding.

JO

Coach.

COACH

It's fine. There's some crossover. "Marriage is like a zone defense."

TOBY

Is it?

COACH

No. Nothing is like a zone defense. A zone defense is like nothing. Put that on my headstone.

JO

We have eight minutes.

COACH

Eight minutes. Thirty-four years and eight minutes. Okay.

He folds the paper and puts it in his pocket.

COACH

Here's what I wanted to say. I wanted to say that it was never about winning.

DESHAWN

Yes, Coach.

COACH

That's a lie. It was about winning. I love winning. I love it so much I once yelled at a referee at a sixth-grade game where my own daughter was not playing. I didn't know anybody on either team. I just felt strongly.

TOBY

I've heard that story.

COACH

Everyone's heard that story. Second thing. I was going to tell you that you're the best group I've ever had.

DESHAWN
(hopeful)

Yes, Coach.

COACH

You're not. Ninety-eight was better. Ninety-eight had a kid who could shoot with his eyes closed. I made him prove it. But you're the group I have, and you're the group I'm going out with, so as of tonight you're the best, and if anybody asks, I'll swear to it.

JO

Six minutes.

COACH

Jo, you keep saying numbers at me like I'm gonna fix them.

JO

Someone has to.

COACH

Next year that's you. Say the numbers. Somebody ought to.

(a beat)

Third thing. I'm not going to a beach. Everybody keeps saying, "Ed, you'll be on a beach." I hate sand. Ruth hated sand. We went once, in eighty-nine, and we came home two days early and never spoke of it. So don't send me postcards of beaches.

TOBY

Where are you gonna be?

COACH

That's a good question, Toby. That's the first good question you've asked in two years.

He sits on the bench. He has never sat down during a talk.

COACH

I don't know. I've been in this room every weekday afternoon since before your parents met. I know what the pipes sound like at four-fifteen. I don't know what my kitchen

sounds like at four-fifteen. I'm going to go find out. I'm told it's fine.

Silence. DESHAWN stands.

DESHAWN

Coach, I had a thing. I practiced a thing. For you. From the team.

COACH

Is it long?

DESHAWN

It's kind of long.

COACH

Do the end of it.

DESHAWN

(thrown, then finding it)

The end is, we're going to win this one for you.

COACH

No, you're not.

DESHAWN

Coach...

COACH

You're going to win it for you. I got thirty-four years of wins. I got a wall of them. What am I gonna do with one more? Put it in the kitchen?

He stands.

COACH

Win it because it's yours. Because Toby's going to be a senior and needs to know what it feels like. Because Jo is going to have to stand in this spot in September, and she'd like to start with a team that remembers how.

JO

Four minutes.

COACH

There it is.

He picks up the marker. He wipes the half-drawn play off the whiteboard with his sleeve. He writes one word: LOUD.

COACH

That's the whole speech. Be loud. Not with your mouth. With everything else.

(beat)

And it doesn't matter if you win.

Everyone stands. They start toward the door. He stops them.

COACH

It matters. Win.

They go. He stays. He listens to the pipes.

END OF SCRIPT