

*Bounce,*

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A few months ago, this sound wouldn't mean anything to me.

Now, I'm the one making this sound. Now, *I'm* the one sitting on the bleachers with *my* teammates at the gym in the park. It was the day of the basketball championships and it felt like my body was torn in two parts. One part was thrilled and bubbly and the other part was horrified and still couldn't wrap its head around the fact that I had signed up for basketball and even made it to the championships.

It's such a shock because before I moved to the Palisades, other than shooting some baskets in my GG's backyard, I had never played basketball in my life. In my very first basketball game, I was the best player on the court! Just kidding! I stunk. I watched my coaches write a bunch of circles and lines on a white board using words like "*offense*" and "*defense*" that I'd heard of before but never really understood. Every time I got the ball, (which was very few times) I would pass it out, regardless if my teammate was nearby or not. And then finally, I thought I was at the perfect place to score and redeem myself from all the mistakes I made before. It was the absolute perfect shot... to the other team's basket! Thankfully, I missed! All I wanted was for the game to end.

And soon enough, it was. I was a lousy teammate with even more lousy sportsmanship. Once the glass doors opened I kept my head down and made my way to the swings.

Only if the sand could swallow me up. My family eventually came and showered me in big hugs and “you did well”. Easy for them to say.

Later in bed, my face drizzled with tears, I tried to come up with more reasonable reasons to get mom to take me out of the program than “we lost.” “We don’t give up in this family,” was mom’s response. And she meant it because the very next day, she and dad turned into full on coaches. We practiced for about an hour, if you include all the water breaks and my sister coming to show us all the snails she had found. I was like a deflated balloon who was slowly getting pumped back up again complete with a ribbon. I made a basket during game two. I never thought getting one orange ball into a circular piece of wire would bring someone so much joy but it did and I started to understand why people loved doing it so much. I was ready. At least, I was pretty sure I was.

Walking to practice one day, a man I had never seen before said “Go get ‘em! Hoop it up!” I didn’t really know what to say so I just smiled at the man and kept walking. Later that night, I told my family and everyone cracked up and called me *Hoop it Up* from then on. *Hoop it up Frazier*. An interesting name but I could get used to it. Even firemen started boxing me out as I passed the fire station.

Soon enough it was the playoffs and guess what! We were going to the championships! All my teammates were excited and giggly. It seemed like nothing could go wrong. But now, during the championships, everything could go wrong. People talk about “Murphy’s Law”. I haven’t really had that experience before and I didn’t want to start now.

The annoying buzzing signal started and my heart sank to my toes like an anchor in water. The ball was a magnet and everyone was drawn to it. Most people got the ball but very few people got it in the hoop. That's why, when this one really nice girl on the other team scored she had this look on her face. It was the look of pure joy. But instead of feeling happy for her, all I wanted to do was rip it off her face like a bandaid. Gee, this basketball stuff is turning me inside out! Then, just as quickly as it started, it was over.

They had won.

All of my teammates looked at each other. I was sure we were thinking the same thing. We had failed. Didn't that mean our team was a big epic failure? Were we a failure? Was *I* a failure?

In my parent's room that night, I told my mom how bad I felt and she rocked me back and forth in her arms like I was the little girl who used to dress up as Doc McStuffins again. "That's not true. You're not a failure. You... just well... lost."

Laying in bed staring at my participation medal, that was glinting in the moonlight, I thought back to my lousy first game. I had come so far since then. Besides, there's no rule that says you aren't allowed to play next season. And just like that I fell asleep. Listening to the soft *bounce, bounce, bounce* in my head as if it were a lullaby.