For those who do not know who I am, which is probably most of you, my name is Conner. The short story that you are about to read took place while I was living in Texas, the holy land of American football where every school practices the faith. Remember that because it will become more prevalent as you continue to read.

More than150 other seventh graders joined me the first day on the practice field. One of them, my hetero life mate Austin. Most of the rest were people I did not associate with very well, which in fact**,** did not help my case as the season progressed. The head coach, Coach Guilly I recall, was about five-feet 10inches with white hair and a plump stomach putting him around 230 pounds. I remember he walked out to the middle of the field with a clipboard in his hand that most likely had all of ournames on it, but he never looked at it. He just looked right at us and put his head down. Every one of ussaw him, and every one of us quieted down so he would have our full attention. Five other coaches were with him, and as they saw he was just going to look at his feet, one of them bellowed out in a very commanding voice.

“I want all of you over at the head coach’s feet now!”

Those who did not run were then told to jog four laps around the field. I remember this because I was one of them. Nevertheless, Coach Guilly continued to show us respect because he refused to start anything until we finishedand were able to join everyone else who sat in front of him. Once we were allsitting, he looked up and began to speak. Keep in mind that we were told later that year that Coach Guilly was actuallya former drill sergeant in the military, but we didn’t have to be told to figure out that little part about him on our own. When he spoke, he spoke at that same sharp voice, same volume, and same dry humor that we as seventh graders thought to be the closest thing to a drill instruction as what we had seen in movies.

Now let me say this, that man was by no means afraid to start swearing. Actually, when he started he usually ranted for a good while – at the same time he would stand with straight posture, heels together, and chin up.

I remember he looked at us all and shouted, “So yaw’ll are what passes for football players!?!”

We just looked at him and nodded, some actuallyresponded, but they did not really project their voices enough to satisfy the coach. In the end that was a bad move oneverybody. He ordered us to stand, line up in the end zone, and get on our stomachs. From there he told us to crawl to the other side of the field with our chest remaining on the ground. Those who did not were required to start over, but by time we were all done we understood the message. When he asked us the same question again, we all yelled “YES.” Some, like me, added a “SIR” to the yell. He liked that.

NowI told youthat little bit of the story just in hopes that I can get across the idea that I, along with everyone else on that team, received a crash course on the meaning of hard work that day. Throughout the rest of the season temperatures would reach sometimes in the triple digits, and Coach Guilly would make everyone dress in full pads and do the same workout as always before practice even started. We would start off with a three-mile run on the school trail, stop, drink the bottle of water we were supposedto be carrying, stop, run two laps around the track, stop, and then do 20 push-ups. Once we were done,we would then go to our associated offensive groups that depended on what position we played, then through practice, we would switch to the defensive groups. I was a running back for offense and a corner back for defense.

The Cain Middle School football team was actuallysplit into A, B, and C teams and were placedin them depending on hard we worked, how well we followed orders, and howwell we played our position. So it was favoredupon if you could play your defensive position as well as your offensive. They would call you into a room one by one and tell you what team you were on and why. Having been in practice for a couple of months now, the coaches knew us all by last name. With all coaches present in that room, Coach Guilly would lay out the plan and the other coaches would pitch in as towhy you were on that team.

The day of team assignment, we had skipped the actualpractice and kept to conditioning the whole time. However, that does not mean the day was any easier, if anything that made it much harder. Everyone knew what day it was and we were pushing it as hard as we possibly could in hopes of making the best final impression that could to the coaches. I think that day it was only in the low-mid 90’soutside, which was nice because in the last week the temperature hadn’t gone down below a hundred. The coaches had just finished the conditioning we had to do and set us up running laps around the track. But,the real benefit aside from the temperature, was that we were allowed to go in our normal workout clothing.

Once the coaches were ready, then they would just yell for us andwewould run over taking the place of the previous person. I remember what I was like stepping into that room. My hands began to shake because of how nervous I was. I could feelmy own heart beat in my chest, and even though we were inside, I swear I could feel a slight breeze against the sweat on my skin. Coach Guilly saw me and set the clipboard he was holding the ground and asked me if I would prefer to sit or stand. For some odd apparent reason I thought standing would be better than sitting. He just sat there and looked at me. I recall the talk went as follows:

“Bankstan tells me you’re a fast little shit with that ball, boy.” Coach Guilly said to me. Bankstan was my running back coach. However, keep in mind that we were all in seventh grade, regardless I was one of the smallest out of everybody signed up for the team; weighing in at 95 pounds and a height of 67 inches, or five-feet two inches.

I replied with a, “I’d like to think so sir.” I swear time seemed to slow as this conversation continued.

“He also said that you are one of his best runners, running your 40 yard run at 4.6 seconds. Boy, at your age, that does make you a fast little shit. However, your skills as a corner are at best mediocre according to Hewitt-” my corner back coach “- and because of that we will split the difference and place you on B team. Any objections?”

I looked at him and thought to myself of course I have a few objections! I have worked myself as hard as I can every day, always wanting to finish first in everything, be the best, and makeA team. I memorized every play, every player’s position, and every player’s job as tohow theywould contribute to every action. Needless to say, I was quite angry.

I remember looking back at him and just saying, “None sir.”

Please, if anything, remember that this story was not written to sadden you in any way. It is only proving an underlining point that I have lived a very happy life, blessed with fortune andgood luck. However, nothing is ever achievedwithout the hard work to show for it. Take Randy Pausch for example, was his last lecture about the sad things of a dying man? No, it was on the things he enjoyed and achieved in his life, and he too showed that everything he achieved he had to work in order to get. This story of me in football is only an example of that. So what if I didn’t make the team I wanted, I took something so much more out of that season. When I look back at it, that season really showed me that hard work is everywhere and certainly not something to complain about because things can be a worse. In the end, I figured out why my dad, who was the one that insisted I join the team in the first place,pushed me so hard to do so.