

THIRD STRING

That's what I'm
talking about!!

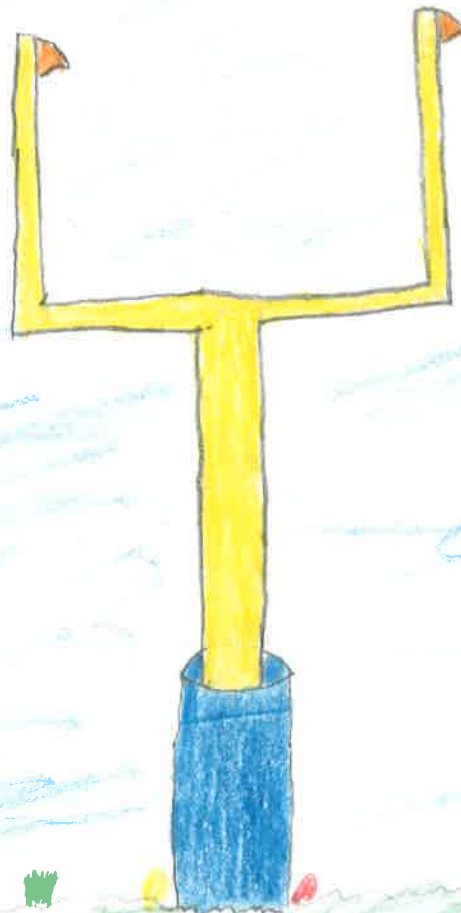
DANG!!

Great!
Run!

TOUCH DOWN!!

woohoo!!

Yab!!



BOB

CATS

Grade 4
Fiction X
Poetry _____
Nonfiction _____

Dominic, just another one of those 7th grade boys who absolutely loved football! There was just one problem; he was third string. That meant he hardly ever got to play. "Put me in coach," he would say. His coach would almost always reply, "If Fred or Michael get hurt you'll go in, OK?" Fred was an eighth grade starter. Michael was in 7th grade and started at tight end with Fred. Unlike most places, 8th grade and 7th grade played together.

Dominic didn't only have it hard at football, he was not the favorite at school either. Sam and all of his friends would gang up on him. Every morning Dominic would get trashed. "Ahhhhh!!!" he would yell as he was going in. But that was not all, the gang would close the top of the dumpster too! This meant Dominic was always late for school. Every day Dominic would brace himself for the gang. He would always look forward to practice which took place 30 minutes after school.

The Bobcat Junior High football field was about 60 yards behind the school. Dominic loved the feeling of the green turf under his cleats as he ran across the huge bobcat painted in the middle of the field. He would always practice much harder than anyone else, however, the coaches never seemed to notice. He would run harder, hit harder, and make bigger plays! Normally the coaches would have him practice at tight end even though he was only 5'5". He would switch off with Michael.

Gameday! It was 7-6 bobcats down and in the fourth quarter with 10 seconds left. Rockets position, on the opposite 30 yard line deep through to the end zone, intercepted! The cornerback Adam Brown picked it off and ran it all the way for a touchdown with only 3 seconds left. The score was now 12-7 bobcats up. John Barbuta kicked and made the PAT, 13-7. The kickoff team ran on the field with 0 seconds left and the bobcats stopped the return. Bobcats win the biggest game of the season..... so far!

The next day before school, while Dominic was preparing to be trashed he saw Sam and the gang walk past him without even touching him. Dominic ran to school just in case they started to follow him. As usual Dominic sat in the back of the lunch room by himself when he heard, "hey Dom', wanna' come sit with me and the dudes?" Dominic was shocked, he didn't know what to say. "Yeah, sure,.... here I come". Dominic picked up his tray and went over and sat by Sam. They all laughed and joked all through lunch.

Later that evening at practice, he heard coach Rob Barbuta who was John's dad say to Dominic "switch out with Sam and Taylor." Those two were the team's quarterbacks. Dominic tried throwing as far as he could, but as he got more tired his arm weakened and he could only throw about 15 yards. Dominic was a fast little guy. They had him practicing quite a few bootlegs. For some reason the team kept encouraging Dominic. As more people kept complimenting him, Dominic was throwing farther and running faster. By the end of practice Dominic was throwing as far as Taylor, who was also in seventh grade, the backup quarterback!

Back at Dominic's house, he was an only child. His mom was always at work but his dad stayed home and cleaned. One night after practice Dominic opened the door and was astonished to see his dad with a beer in his hand sitting on the couch! His parents never drank. He walked in and said to his dad "What are you doing?" His father just got up and went upstairs to his bedroom and got on his phone. When Dominic's mother got home she made him some mac and cheese. Dominic didn't say anything about his dad.

That morning, his mom was still at their little house which was unusual. His dad was not though. "Where is dad?" he asked. His mom was not happy to say "We are getting a divorce." Dominic was scared. He didn't know what to do. The poor boy did not go to school that day and he was not as good at practice either. Coach Barbuta at one point asked him what was wrong but he just said he wasn't feeling good.

The next day at school Dominic went back to sitting alone. Every time someone would invite him to sit with them he would kindly say "no thank you." When Dominic went home after football practice that night his mom had some news, "I'm sorry about your dad. He met a new girl named Jenny. They already have a plan on where they are going to live. You probably won't see your dad for a while now. Just know if you ever need anything I will be here for you. Your coach and all your teammates are too, Ok?" Dominic felt a lot better now that his mom had said those words. He started sitting with his friends again. And at practice Dominic was back to his normal.

About two weeks later Dominic and the Bobcats had a rematch against the Rockets. That game determined who went to the state championship. Bobcats down, with the score at 6-7. With 10 seconds left on the rockets 45 yard line it was first down. Suddenly, a blitzing linebacker flew through the line and demolished Sam's right knee! As Sam was caterwauling off the field Coach Barbuta told Taylor to hurry on the field and call a play.

Taylor was not sure what to call. Normally at practice coach would tell him what play to run, but not in a game! Taylor just called an option pass to one of the Tight Ends, but of course no one was open, so he just scrambled and ran. Taylor tried to slide but the refs thought he was trying to slide tackle. TWEET!!!! "Unsportsmanlike conduct, number 13. Five yard penalty, still second down." The Bobcats' small section of fans started to boo the refs. Taylor thought they were booing him so he started sobbing and sprinted off to the locker room. "Coach, can I go in?" Dominic was crossing his fingers, "please, please!?" he was begging his coach. "Well what are you waiting for, get in there and win us this game!" Dominic felt a grin spreading across his face. It got so big his mouth guard almost fell out. "Ok guys, let's run a bomb pass. Fred and all you receivers go deeeeeeeep." When they broke the huddle Dominic felt the shivers spread across his body from head to toe. Dominic barked out the signals, grabbed the snap, shuffled back about 4 yards when....

Fred was wide open on the 15 yard line and still sprinting, Dominic was back on the 45. He heard the crowd shouting "3-2-..." Dominic chucked the ball down the field and amazingly the ball flew inches over the safety's hands. To Dominic it felt as if it was going in slow-motion. Fred didn't have to break stride as he cradled the soaring ball.

The crowd roared with excitement when they saw Fred standing in the end zone doing a little celebration. Forward, back, forward, left, back, right, bow. The score was now 12-7, this time Bobcats up! After their TD, John smashed the ball through the uprights. The whole team could not stop looking at the scoreboard. It read, "13-7, 1.4seconds left." Dominic waited to watch the kick off. The pig skin flew through the air after being obliterated by John's foot. It seemed as if it had wings. BOOM! It hit the returner smack in the middle of the chest so hard it just bounced right back into the air. Dominic was over on the bench when he heard the crowd screaming again. "Dom, come here" he heard a voice call. "The rockets recovered it but one of our players was right there to make the tackle. Now look at the scoreboard." coach Barbuta said. Dominic read out loud, "13-7, Us! 0 seconds left. That, that's a W!"

That night Dominic lay in his bed thinking, "*it's not that my friends like me and hang out with me because I'm good, it's because I'm nice and kind to them.*" He started naming a few nice things he had done for his friends before he fell asleep, "*I gave Sam a get well card while he was in the ER after our game. I bought food for Fred one day because he forgot his lunch money, and I also brought cookies to all my neighbors.....*"

Dominic was happy for the majority of the remaining year. He also won a few prizes in the spelling bee. Dom, as his friends called him, was doing better at school now that he knew he had true friends. He was also quite a writer, he had the perfect narrative to write... and he called it, "Third String."