

Pass It On®...

The Last Person you Think of Should Probably be the First.

How a group of high school boys practiced the art of inclusion.

Marcus is a handsome, athletic kid. His friends are on the basketball and track teams. He plays tennis and competes in the state tournament every year.

Marcus's neighbor, Conrad, also wants to compete, but he has rheumatoid arthritis(RA). Although it pains him just to walk, he endures days at school walking from class to class, and weekly injections into his toes. But he doesn't miss a game. He loves to watch his school compete.

Marcus has known Conrad since elementary school. They've always been friends, but their abilities separate them. High school is a time of defining yourself, finding out who you are. And that means a lot of kids are focused on themselves.

Marcus is different. He sees Conrad in pain, and sees his frustration at not being able to play sports. So, one night a week, Marcus brings his friends over to Conrad's for a video game competition. The contests are as loud and rowdy as a high school basketball game. They often go late into the night, occasionally lasting past midnight on a school day. But nobody is complaining, especially Conrad's mother. "We are trying a lot of different treatments, seeing a lot of doctors," she says. "Conrad is in constant pain, and all he wants is to be a kid. These friends, they make him forget the hurt."

Finally, the doctors hit on a combination of medications that relieve the pain. Conrad walks without pain, then begins running. He joins the cross-country team, and despite his long legs, he has to learn the form of running. After a childhood of walking gingerly and taking small steps, Conrad has to retrain his stride. And he has to get into shape. He pushes himself every day, building his lungs, strengthening his legs and core. His uniform hangs on his slight frame, but he runs. He knows what pain feels like, and running for Conrad is no longer painful. It is elation; it is joy; it is the rewarding breath of effort that means you're alive.

Conrad doesn't win, not once. But Marcus is there with a group of athletes in the stands, cheering for

the kid who always finishes in the middle of the pack, sucking wind and smiling. Friends motivate us. They remind us that our best doesn't have to measure up to somebody else's best. Just being is enough.

Friendship...PassItOn.com

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