

Basketball Madness

I hold the ticket in my hand. I have carried it in my pocket all day long. It is a flimsy, worn stub of paper. It is dog-eared with a small tear.



Fragile and worthless. But it promises me something special and invaluable. I hand the ticket to a clerk at the entrance gate. She smiles and nods solemnly. I enter the arena. Each week, I join thousands of others in the arena to cheer on our basketball team.

Inside the arena, I join a sea of red and blue.

Men and women, old and young, from all walks of life, wear our team colors in shirts, hats, coats, and pants. The cavernous hallways are cramped with our slow-moving procession. I shuffle along, shoulder-to-shoulder with other

fans. We are strangers, but we feel a strong camaraderie. Someone pats me on the back. Another slaps my hand with a high five.

“Johnson will get a triple-double tonight for sure,” says one.

“Look for Barker in the post all night long,” says another.

“Miller has to protect the paint,” I add.

We speak this strange secret language, the language of basketball. We nod in agreement. We furrow our brows. We wave red and blue banners. I hear a voice rise in song. Others join in the chant, and soon all of our voices sing our team’s fight song together. I parade the halls, arm-in-arm with my comrades, singing and smiling. Then I see it. Section 22. I break off from the throng and walk down the gangway.

Before I even see the court, I hear the telltale squeaking of sneakers. I hear the bouncing of balls on the wooden floor below. From my high seat, the court looks small, a tiny wooden rectangle etched with white lines, circles, and dashes. The players, too, look small. But I know that they are towers of men. They are athletes in the prime of life, lean and vicious.

Exquisite specimens of the human race.

They move like hulking ballerinas. They bound across the floor with spins and leaps. They float toward the basket like graceful astronauts in space. But this is no ballet. The bodies bang and crash to the floor. Carefully synchronized movements collapse into chaos. The men chase the little orange basketball with a crazy mania.

Whistles trill. Buzzers sound. I hear the men wheeze and yell. And always, the numbers on the scoreboard tick higher and higher. With every basket, the crowd gasps. People scream. Some pray. We do whatever we can to urge our team to victory.

I am fiercely devoted to my team. Some people tell me that they don't like sports. They say they don't understand why someone would put so much effort into supporting a team.

Understand? Sports are not about understanding. Understanding is a function of the brain. Supporting a team is a function of the heart.

Each game, I put my emotions on the line. I love the players unconditionally. When they are injured, I am injured. When they slump, I slump. With each defeat, I am crushed. With each victory, I am elated. I ride this roller coaster of emotions every season with my

fellow fans. We endure the highs and lows together.

Sometimes the moments are unbearable. Like now. The game is almost over. There are just a few seconds left on the clock. Our team is losing by a mere four points, but it seems an impossible margin. The bodies below are exhausted. They battle sluggishly. All seems lost.

But wait! The ball is stolen. An impossible shot pulls us within one point of our opponents.

These next seconds will be unbearable. Or exhilarating. I clench my teeth. The arena buzzes with tension. Could it be? Our opponents make a costly mistake. The ball is ours. Our players speed down the court, wild and out of sync. But out of this chaos the ball rises up. The buzzer sounds. We all hold our breath as the basketball finds the

hoop and swishes through the netting. We have won! The arena explodes into cheers and laughter. For this one night, we are victorious, unbeatable, invincible.

The End