

## Michael and the Meanies

Michael loved playing ball more than anything else in the world. Whether it was soccer, basketball, or just throwing a ball against the wall, he was always playing. The only problem was, Michael wasn't very good at it. No matter how hard he tried, his kicks didn't go far, his shots didn't land in the basket, and he always seemed to miss when trying to catch.

Still, Michael kept practicing every day after school in the park. He wanted to get better. But there was another problem—some boys from his class, Kyle and Jason, had noticed that Michael wasn't very good, and they made fun of him all the time. They'd laugh when he missed a shot, call him names, and even kick the ball away when he was practicing.

One day, while Michael was struggling to dribble a soccer ball across the field, Kyle and Jason showed up again. "Hey, Michael," Kyle sneered, "you should give up! You're never going to get good at this."

"Yeah," Jason added, "why don't you try playing with baby toys instead?"

Michael's face turned red, but he didn't want to let them see how upset he was. He tried to ignore them and kept playing, but their teasing stung.

That night, Michael was sitting in his room feeling sad when his big brother, Ben, came in. Ben was good at everything—sports, school, and making friends. "What's wrong, Michael?" he asked, sitting next to him.

Michael sighed. "I love playing ball, but I'm not good at it. And Kyle and Jason keep teasing me, saying I'll never get better."

Ben thought for a moment, then smiled. "You know, Michael, it's not about being the best. It's about having fun and improving little by little. And as for those bullies, how about we teach them a lesson—but not in the way you're thinking."

Michael looked up, curious. "What do you mean?"

"The next time they tease you, I'll help you show them that having fun and trying your best is what really matters."

The next day, Ben went to the park with Michael. As usual, Kyle and Jason were there, ready with their mean comments. But before they could say anything, Ben stepped onto the field with a soccer ball.

"Hey, how about we all play a game together?" Ben said with a grin. "Two-on-two—me and Michael against you two."

Kyle and Jason looked surprised but agreed, eager to show off. The game started, and at first, Michael was nervous. But Ben kept encouraging him, passing him the ball and telling him, "You've got this!" Slowly, Michael started to relax and enjoy himself.

The bullies were shocked when Ben didn't focus on winning, but instead helped Michael with every move. And something strange happened—Michael's kicks got better, and he even managed to score a goal!

By the end of the game, Kyle and Jason were out of breath, and Ben smiled. "See? It doesn't matter if you win or lose. What matters is that Michael kept playing and got better."

Kyle and Jason shuffled awkwardly, realizing their teasing didn't work anymore. They mumbled something about going home and left the park.

Michael beamed up at Ben. "Thanks, Ben. That was awesome!"

Ben patted his shoulder. "Anytime, little brother. Just remember, as long as you're having fun and trying your best, you've already won."

From that day on, Michael kept practicing with a big smile on his face. And whenever Kyle and Jason saw him, they didn't dare tease him anymore—because they knew Michael was stronger than they'd ever imagined.