

# Pre-Story

## Part One

“A champion needs motivation above and beyond winning” (Pat Riley).



“It isn’t the mountain ahead to climb that wears you out, it’s the pebble in your shoe” (Mohammad Ali).



“Good morning everyone! I know all of you really like to think out loud but please quiet down, and Tony, I am sorry about your sand situation.”

Everyone laughed.

“I hope everyone is excited for our first day! Our season lasts 20 weeks. There are roughly 10 concepts that we are going to learn over the course of this season so I have divided it up into 10 two week segments. At the end of practice I will hand out the schedule for each week. Our focus for the next two weeks will be solidarity. Does anybody know what solidarity means?”

“Coach I thought we were going to be learning new skills.”

“Brittney we are!”

“No like volleyball skills.”

“We are!”

“No I mean like learning new things to get us better at playing.”

“Brittney, We are!”

“You are so annoying! Never mind!”

“Weeks three and four we will be working on our mindfulness. Weeks five and six will be similar. We will focus on presence of mind. Weeks seven and eight are for leadership and weeks nine and ten are for collaboration. Authenticity, imagination, and love are weeks 11-15. I think weeks 16 and 17 are extra important because our focus will be self-compassion. “Finally, we will end the season with self-determination.”

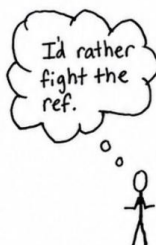
### **Solidarity**

Mutual support within a group, especially during hardship or struggle. In times of crisis, neighbors demonstrated solidarity by sharing food and shelter instead of fighting each other for the remaining resources. Solidarity turns “I” into “we” without erasing individuality

“We are only as strong as we are united, as weak as we are divided.”

*(J.K. Rowling)*

“The only way to prove you’re a good sport is to lose” (Earnie Banks).



### **Mindfulness**

Mindfulness is like installing a pause button before reacting— suddenly you have options. It’s not about emptying the mind but about noticing the mind without getting swept away. Stay calm and respond rather than react. Practice meditation and breathwork

### **Presence of Mind**

It is the ability to remain calm and think clearly in stressful or unexpected situations.

Presence of mind is the difference between panic and problem-solving.

## Leadership

Leadership is the act of guiding or directing a group toward a goal. The capacity to inspire, influence. It is less about being in front and more about making it safe for others to step forward. Think of it as creating a stage where everyone can perform their best.

## Collaboration

A process of sharing ideas, responsibilities, and credit to produce something better than any individual could alone. Collaboration is like cooking with others: different ingredients, one pot, and a shared recipe that evolves.

## Authenticity

“You are not a drop in the ocean. You are an entire ocean in a drop” (*Rumi*)

“Be yourself: everyone else is already taken.” (*Oscar Wilde*)

## Imagination

“Imagination is more important than knowledge.” (*Albert Einstein*)

“Logic will get you from A to B. Imagination will take you everywhere.”

(*Albert Einstein*)

## Love

“Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend.”

(*Martin Luther King Jr*)

“Where there is love there is life.”

(*Mahatma Gandhi*)

“The only way to do great work is to do what you love” (*Steve Jobs*).



## Self-Compassion

“You yourself, as much as anybody in the entire universe, deserve your love and affection”  
(*Buddha*).

Treat yourself with the same kindness and understanding you would offer a friend in distress.

“Pain doesn’t tell you when you ought to stop. Pain is the little voice in your head that tries to hold you back because it knows if you continue you will change” (Kobe Bryant).



### **Self-Determination**

“The most courageous act is still to think for yourself.” (*Coco Chanel*)

“You must be the change you wish to see in the world.” (*Mahatma Gandhi*)

“Believe you can and you’re half way there” (Theodore Roosevelt).



## Part Two

"I hope everyone is having a great day! The inspirational quote today is from Bethany Hamilton,

*'Courage doesn't mean you don't get afraid. Courage means you don't let fear stop you.'*

We will continue with defensive drills for the whole week. This practice and next practice we will be doing a lot of hand digging."



"I want everyone to bring an inspirational quote you really like to practice on Wednesday. Everyone will share their quote in front of the group and talk about it for a minute or two. It will be easy. Don't think of it like a presentation, but it is. Just don't over think it."

Wednesday practice started right on schedule.

"Okay, Tony you are up first"

"Thanks Coach. Treat a person as he is, and he will remain as he is. Treat him as he could be, and they will become what they should be" (Jimmy Johnson).



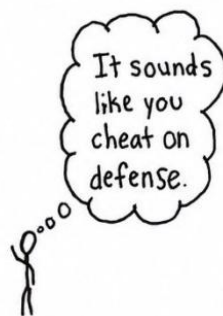
“It always seems impossible until It’s done” (Nelson Mandela).



“I can accept failure, everyone fails at something, but I can’t accept not trying” (Michael Jordan).



“I don’t have to wait for nobody. I move when I wanna move” (Floyd Mayweather).



“Last but not least, Brittney you are up”

“Thanks coach. My quote is from Aly Raisman. She is my favorite. She said, ‘You have to remember that the hard days are what makes you stronger. The bad days make you realize

what a good day is. If you never had any bad days, you would never have that sense of accomplishment”

## Part Three

Before the start of the next practice all the athletes and coaches were already waiting patiently under the tent for Coach's poem of the day. It was the ritual for the afternoon practices, and everyone loved his poems—especially Maya. Maya is a little younger than the rest of the group but still enjoys practicing with the older girls, even if they pick on her.

When Coach arrived, he greeted everyone with a huge smile and said, "Good afternoon! How is everybody doing today?"

"Great!" shouted Maya. "What's the poem for today? I want to hear it!"

Coach looked down at the sand and said, "I actually don't have a new one today."

Everyone was in disbelief, but he quickly remembered the one he prepared for a rainy day a couple months back. While he began flipping through his notebook, everyone started to gather around. Once he found the right page, he prefaced, "This one might seem a little ironic: it's called 'There Is Nothing New Under the Sun,'" and then began reading it to the group.

**"What has been,**

**That will be;**

**What has been done;**

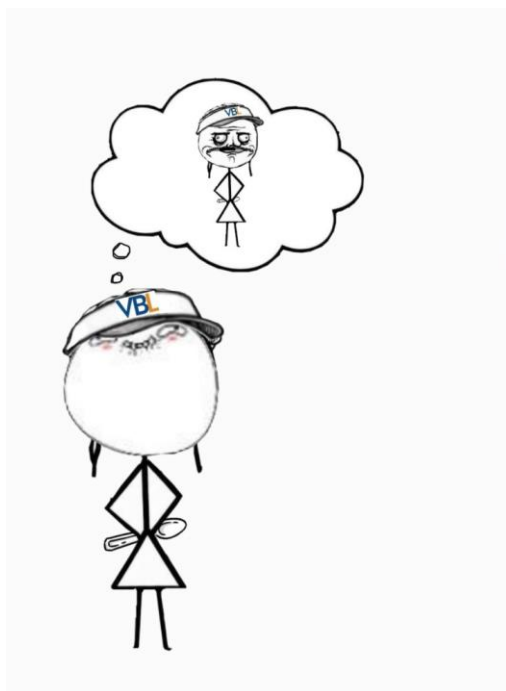
**That will be done.**

**There is nothing new under the sun."**

Everyone applauded, even Brittney and Taylor.

In the far back, Maya yelled, "Coach! Drop the mic! That was fire!" She pushed her way to the front with a plastic spoon from her lunch box in her hand, then said, "Here coach! Use this!"

Everyone quickly went to their courts after the mic drop to start warming up. Jamie was just a few seconds behind the rest of the crowd.



## Part Four

It was just about 6:30 a.m., and the sun hadn't even burned off the morning haze. Brittney and Taylor arrived late, dragging their feet across the sand with their hoodies pulled tight to fight the ocean breeze. Mathew was already there, pacing like a caffeinated motivational speaker waiting for his audience. Coach Emma sipped her iced coffee, pretending she wasn't bracing herself for whatever quote Mathew had dug up this time. By the time Brittney and Taylor reached the court, everyone already knew what was coming.

Every practice started with the exact same ritual. Mathew called for all the athletes and coaches to gather around.

"Today's inspirational quote—"

"Ughhhhhh," Brittney sighed loud enough for the entire group to hear.

Mathew cleared his throat dramatically. "Today's inspirational quote is from an old NFL coach, Bum Phillips. He said, 'You fail all the time, but you aren't a failure, only if you blame others.'" He paused, noticing the slightest bit of confusion on Coach Emma's face. "Wait—I think I read that wrong. 'You fail all the time, but you aren't a failure until you start blaming others.'"

Taylor immediately turned to Brittney and whispered, "He's totally talking about you."

"No way! He's gaslighting Coach Jordan!"

Jordan looked up from his phone.

Everyone began to laugh.

At the end of practice, coach gathered all the athletes then said, "Great job today! I know the quote of the day is usually at the start of practice, but I have a couple more to wrap things up,

'The greatest danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it, but that it is too low and we reach it' (*Michelangelo*).

'Having an opportunity in life is important but what defines you is what you do with that opportunity' (*Richard Whitehead*).'

'I will do what others won't, so I can accomplish what others can't' (*Jerry Rice*).'

Also, we are going to have a little bit of homework for the next few weeks. I know some of you have really enjoyed this activity in the past; for the next month will be doing a daily diary entry. You can write about whatever you would like and you will have an opportunity to

share your diary entries at the end of each practice if any of you are interested in. The coaches will be participating in the journaling as well, and I am also asking all of your parents to join us with this activity.”

Dear diary,

I remember my mom always yelling at me, criticizing some aspect of my game. I wish I had the opportunity to rely on myself more. I’ve always had my mom pushing me and guiltting me into working harder so its never felt like anything I accomplished was mine, it always felt like it’s my mom’s doing. Which I think led to my lack of confidence. I wish I was tougher mentally when I played in college. I still believe that was the main thing hindering me from performing better. I remember being so hard on myself and that every mistake I made meant I was actually terrible at volleyball... That would literally ruin my week. I’m still learning how to get out of that mindset. I’ve come a long way since high school. It helps not having my mom in my ear all the time. Coach said being more self compassionate will change my life.

Dear diary,

Where do I find the courage to take risks? The universe even has a plan for even the tiniest seed to become a giant oak; it’s in its DNA. It makes no difference for the seed/tree to be aware of what it’s becoming. It just becomes. “I’d rather regret the risks that didn’t work out than the chances I didn’t take at all” (Simone Biles)

Dear diary,

When I was a kid, I had the most absurd expectations. Any time I played or practiced, I had to play perfectly. When I fell short of my expectations, it would consume my thoughts, and at some point, after ruminating on it long enough, I would let it ruin entire my day. My only focus should have been trying my best. I don’t know why I put so much pressure on myself to perform. A lot of what happens in the game is out of my control anyway.



Dear diary,

I was a competitive swimmer before I began taking volleyball seriously. I always loved the relay events; they turned an individual sport into a team sport. After all these years as an athlete, parent, and coach, I don't understand why so many coaches still allow select athletes to compete, especially on the starting squad, when they miss practice repeatedly, or on a regular basis. For me, the hardest part of the sport was cheering for a teammate who hadn't been there to support the rest of the team. I wish everyone practiced more, not because I think everyone needs to get better, but because we all need to get better at BEING a teammate. If we removed the friction from our team dynamic and culture, we would have spent less time focusing on our team's performance. I wish I never let losing get in the way of my friendships.

Dear diary,

The best memories I have come from playing volleyball as a family, even though one of us would end up crying almost every time. I wish my siblings and I weren't so competitive. I remember we would make a competition out of almost everything. It didn't matter how dumb the game was, we wanted to win. Our family played the wii a ton too. I think we liked it so much because it was an even playing field for the entire family, but honestly, we took the "we" out of the wii. We would fight and argue so much. Deep down I still don't think my siblings actually know how much I care about them. I hope they know that never took away from how much I love them. I feel like they know that, but we don't talk much anymore and it makes me sad. Coach said he would cry after every family game night as a kid too. Unless he won, then he said his sister would cry. He also said to stop being a dork and just talk to them more. I'm not a dork. Am I?

Dear diary,

I wish people trusted me more. If I mess up literally one time, my partner thinks they need to start optioning. Just because you think about it a bunch doesn't make it matter more. I get mad when people don't understand that perfection is impossible and that sometimes things just don't work out! That's life! Like, what heck?! Have you never failed? Or do you just choose not to acknowledge it? I would empathize, but it is hard because of how privileged they are. When I mess up and people act this way, I can only assume they get everything they want the first time. The hardest part is when they mess up. It's so ironic. Apparently, nothing is ever their fault. Coach says I can guide and collaborate with anyone. I just need to start with common ground and similarities, not the differences. Coach always talks about common humanity. He's so annoying.

## Part Five

Tyler loves creating character development workshops for the athletes, their parents, and the coaching staff. Tyler believes a majority of character development happens off the court.

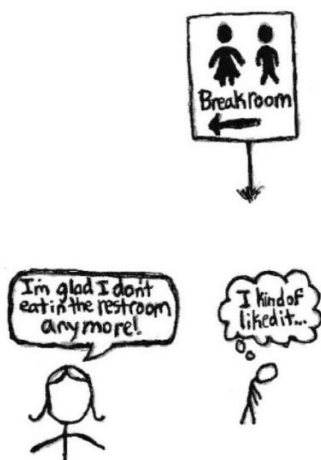


Half way through the event, Tyler handed each person a book, "Atomic Habits" by James clear.



At the end of the character development workshop, Tyler told the group of parents, athletes and coaching staff, "Our goal for the season is to remove as much friction from good habits as possible and add friction to bad habits if necessary. Personally, I drink more water when there is already a full glass waiting for me in the refrigerator. I also use my phone less at night when I turn it off before going to bed, even if I end up turning it back on. Eventually these subtle changes begin to compound, and in no time, you will find yourself light years ahead of where you ever thought possible."

By the following weekend everyone found ways to make subtle changes that fit their lifestyles, some adjusted their eating habits to better fit their schedules. One parent designed new hats and visors that block the sweat from dripping in your face. Our trainer also did extensive research on pillows and recommended an ergonomic pillow for the best possible sleep and recovery.



The first tournament of the season is just around the corner and the group couldn't have been more prepared. Or at least everything looked perfect on paper.

"Is everyone excited for our first tournament next weekend?"

Everyone screamed, "Yes!"

Except for Maya. Maya answered with a contingency, "Only if someone watches my parents for the weekend so I can compete in peace."

"Coach! Will you tell us a story about when you used to compete?"

"I have a perfect story."

## Part Six



“No seriously though! Tell us a better story.”

At the time, I was not disciplined.



I could make spectacular defensive plays and then miss three ordinary serves.



I loved competition, photographs, recognition, and the way people gathered near a court when a match became interesting.

**I did not love  
stretching.**





I did not love arriving before sunrise to practice passing when no one was there to admire it.





The professional game was growing, tours were becoming more organized, and athletes were beginning to imagine careers beyond local tournaments. I talked about all of it constantly.

"One day I'm playing the Manhattan final," I said after practice.

Ruth rolled a boundary line into a perfect circle.



"It cost ninety-nine cents."



Ruth walked toward the parking lot before I could respond.

No explanation.

That was Ruth's style.

"Never miss twice," Ruth said when I admitted skipping two mornings.



I began keeping the notebook on top of my shoes at night so I could not dress without touching it.



My mornings became easier not because my motivation improved, but because fewer decisions remained.



Not because I believed it harder.

Because I collected evidence.

The ritual did not remove conflict.

It kept conflict from expanding before we chose what it meant.



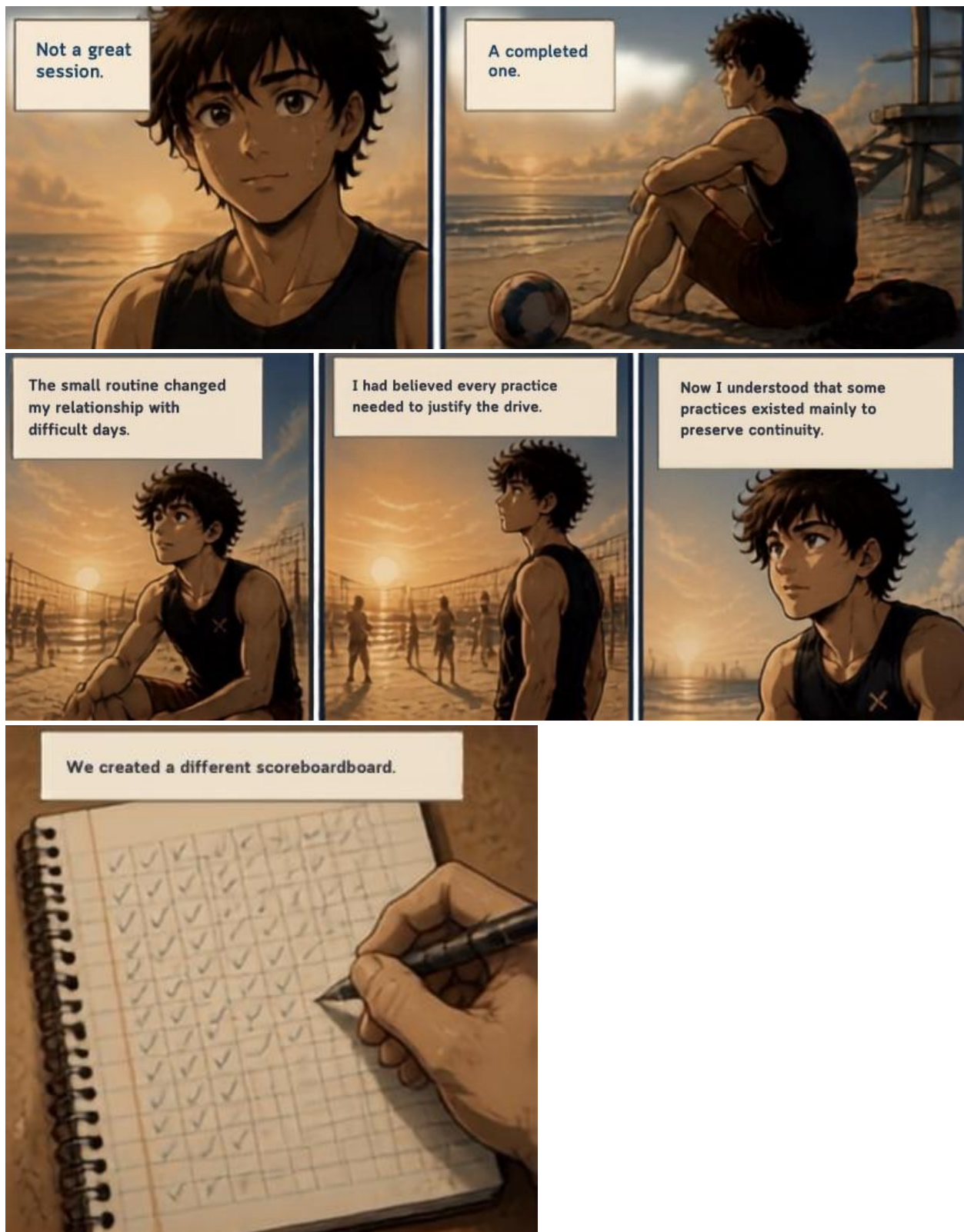
Normally, I would have skipped the beach completely.

Instead, I drove down, put on my shoes, touched the sand, and passed five balls against the side of an empty lifeguard tower.

Five became twenty.

Twenty became serving.

I practiced for fourteen minutes.



After each tournament, I rated only behaviors:

Did I complete my serving routine?

Did I communicate after mistakes?

Did I drink water before feeling thirsty?

Did I watch the wind before warm-up?

Did I recover before the next match?

Did I help pack equipment before leaving?



“A professional.”

“That’s a result.”

Ruth tapped the notebook.

“Who?”

I wrote:

A dependable athlete who improves the court and the people around it.

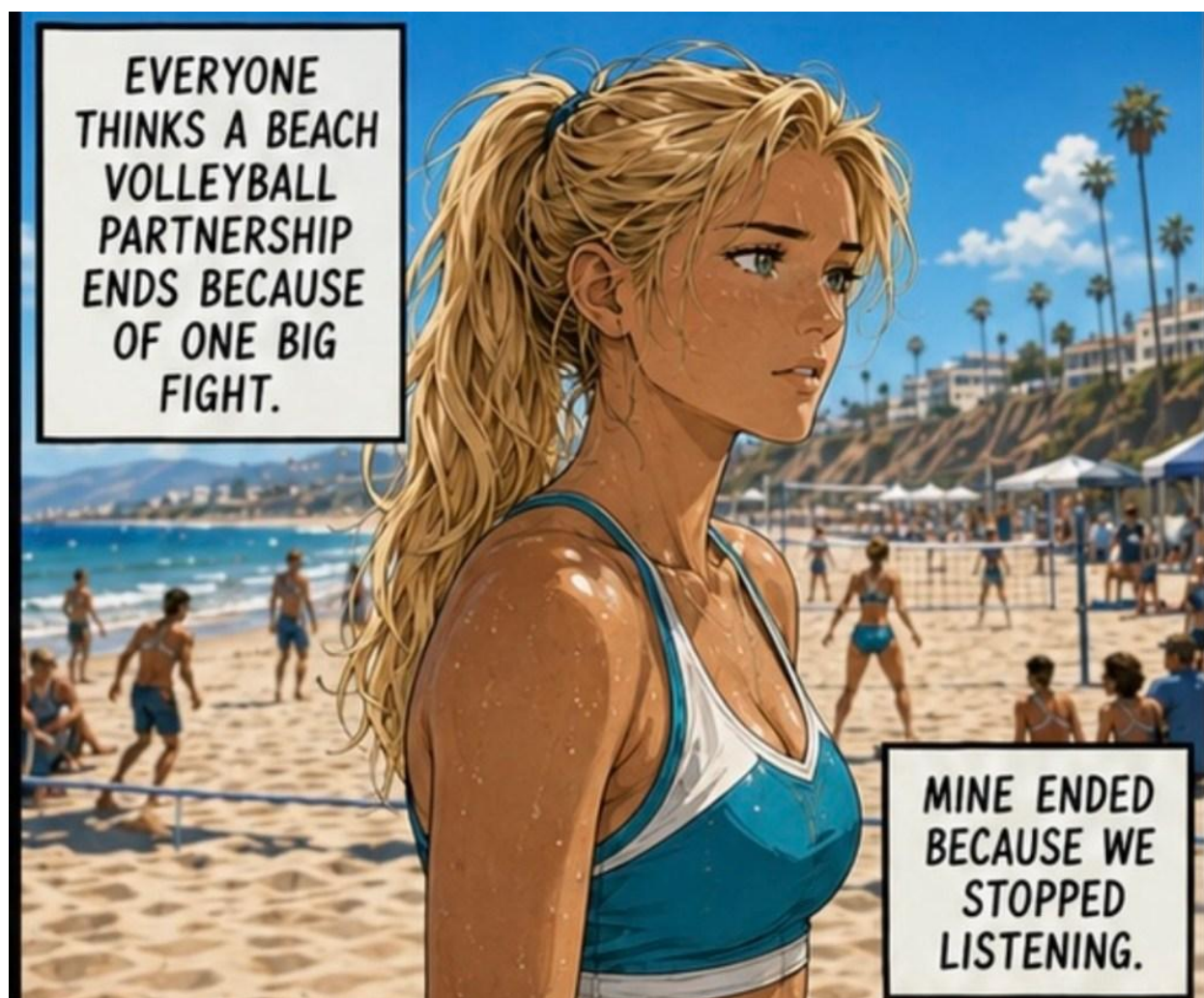
That identity was larger than winning.

Everyone began clapping!

“Great story!”

“Coach! Whats your story for us?”

“Jamie and I have similar stories. I’ll let her share first”



EVERYONE  
THINKS A BEACH  
VOLLEYBALL  
PARTNERSHIP  
ENDS BECAUSE  
OF ONE BIG  
FIGHT.

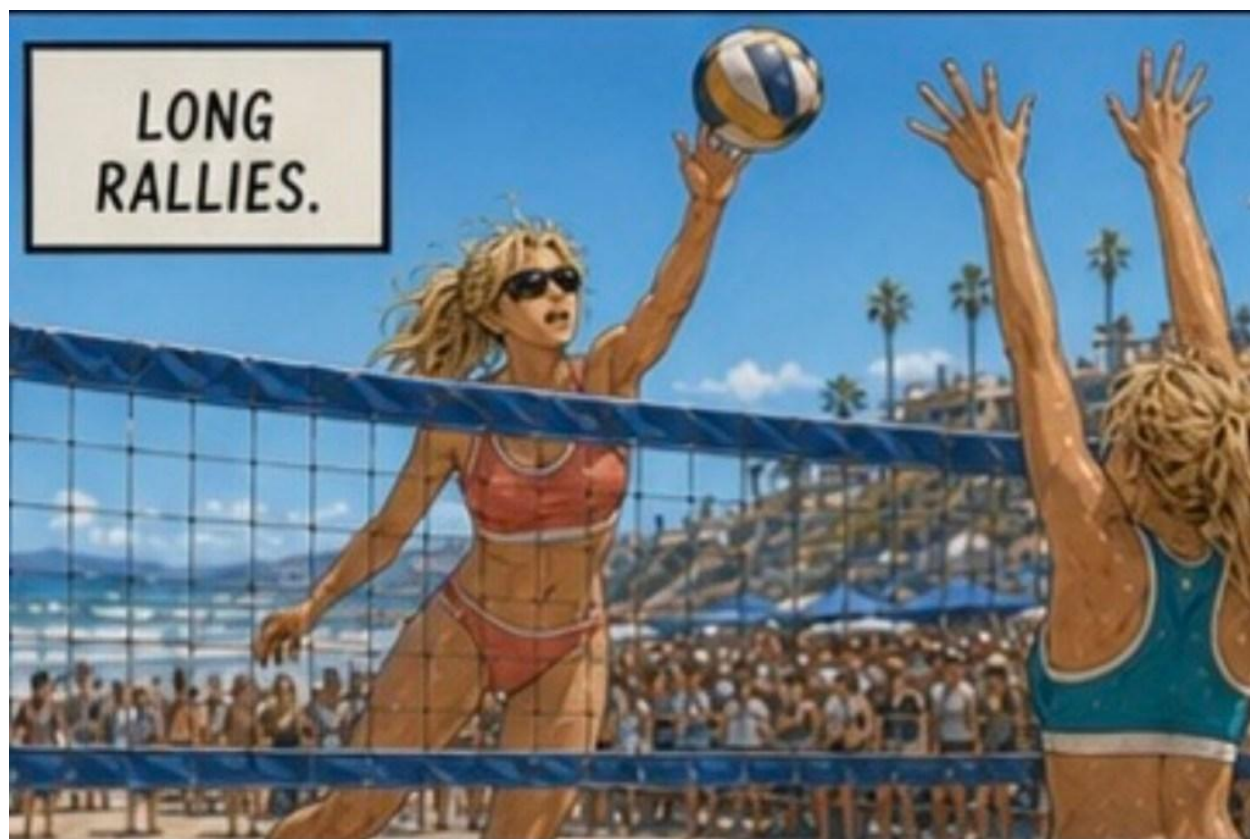
MINE ENDED  
BECAUSE WE  
STOPPED  
LISTENING.

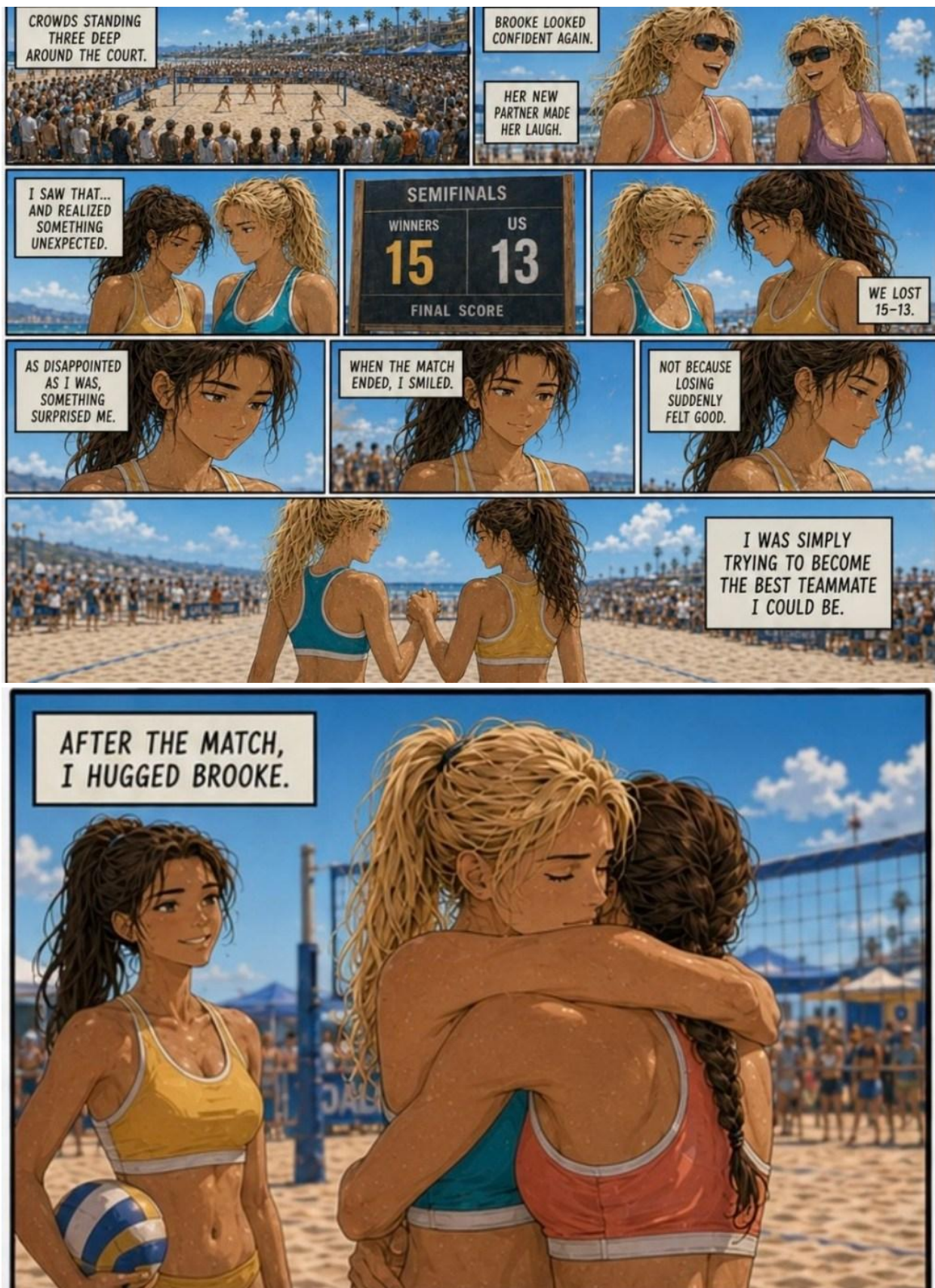
BY THE SUMMER OF 1998, BROOKE AND I  
HAD SPENT NEARLY FOUR YEARS TOGETHER  
ON THE CALIFORNIA BEACH CIRCUIT. WE'D  
GRADUATED FROM TINY LOCAL TOURNAMENTS  
THAT HARDLY PAID FOR DINNER TO PLAYING  
WOMEN WE ONCE ASKED FOR AUTOGRAPHS.  
PEOPLE CALLED US ONE OF THE TOUGHEST  
DEFENSIVE TEAMS ON THE SAND.

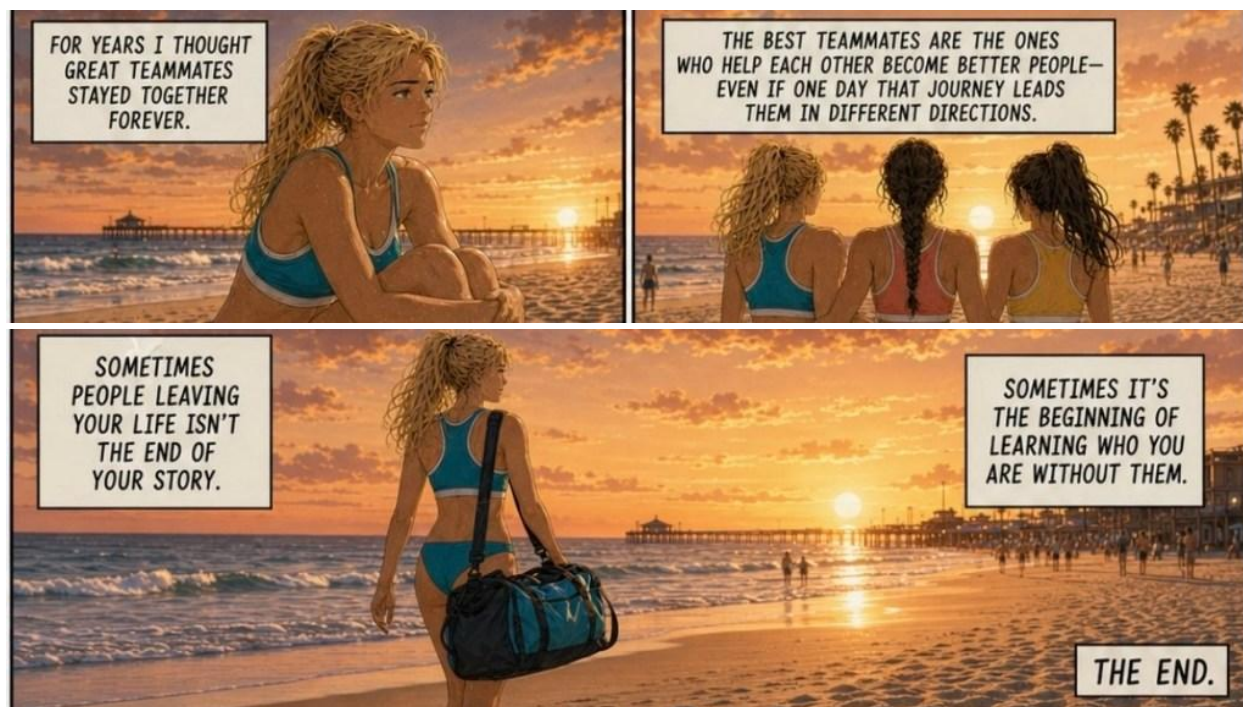












People assumed  
I left because  
I wanted a better  
partner.

The truth was  
much harder  
to explain.

I left because  
I missed my  
best friend.



When Mia and  
I first started  
playing together,  
volleyball was fun.

We celebrated  
every point like  
we'd won the  
championship.



We practiced  
until sunset  
because neither  
of us wanted  
to leave  
the beach.



Somewhere along the road to becoming professionals, everything changed.  
We became obsessed with perfection.

If I missed  
a serve,  
I'd apologize  
five times.



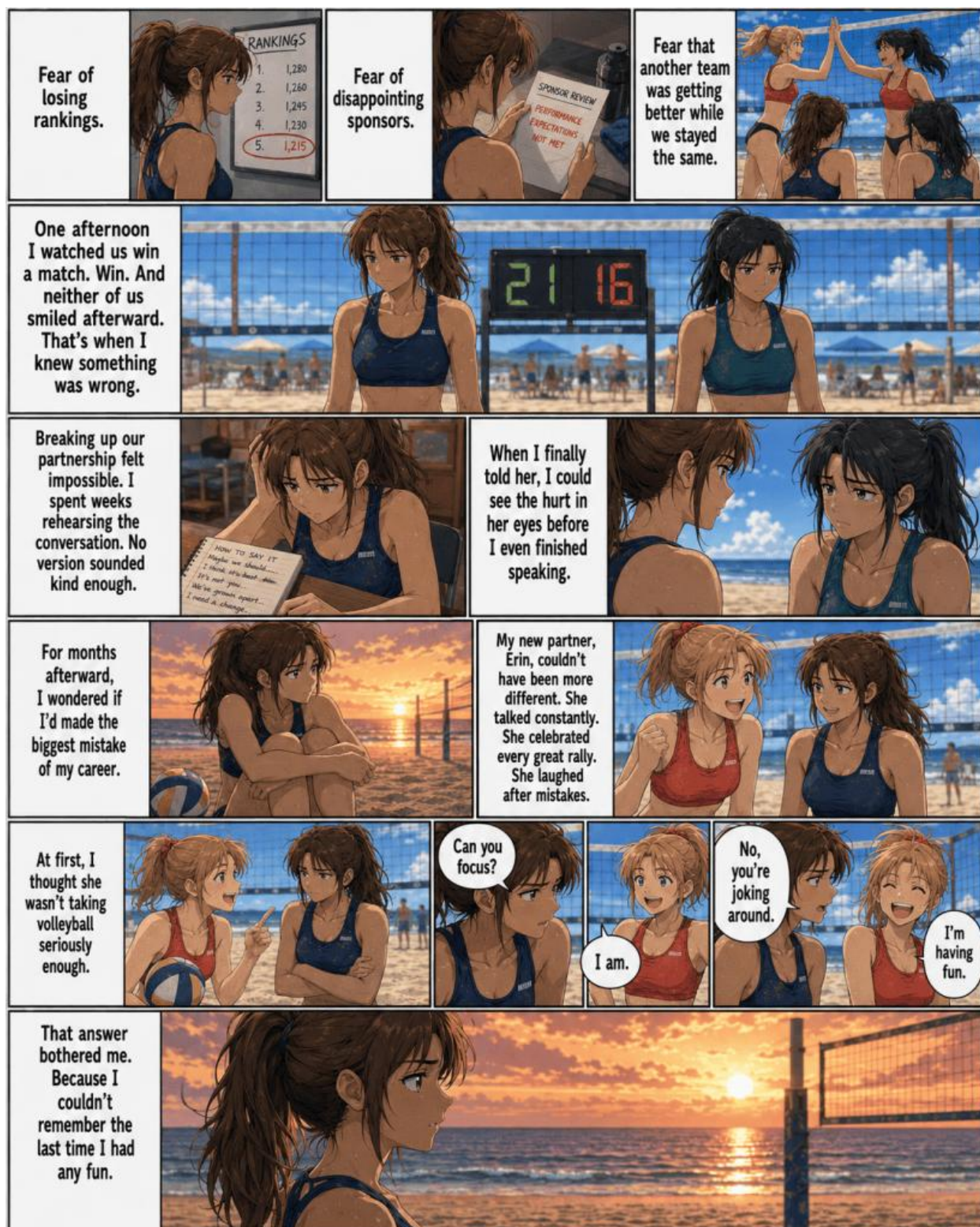
If Mia  
shanked  
a pass,  
she'd spend  
the next  
three rallies  
trying to  
make up  
for it.

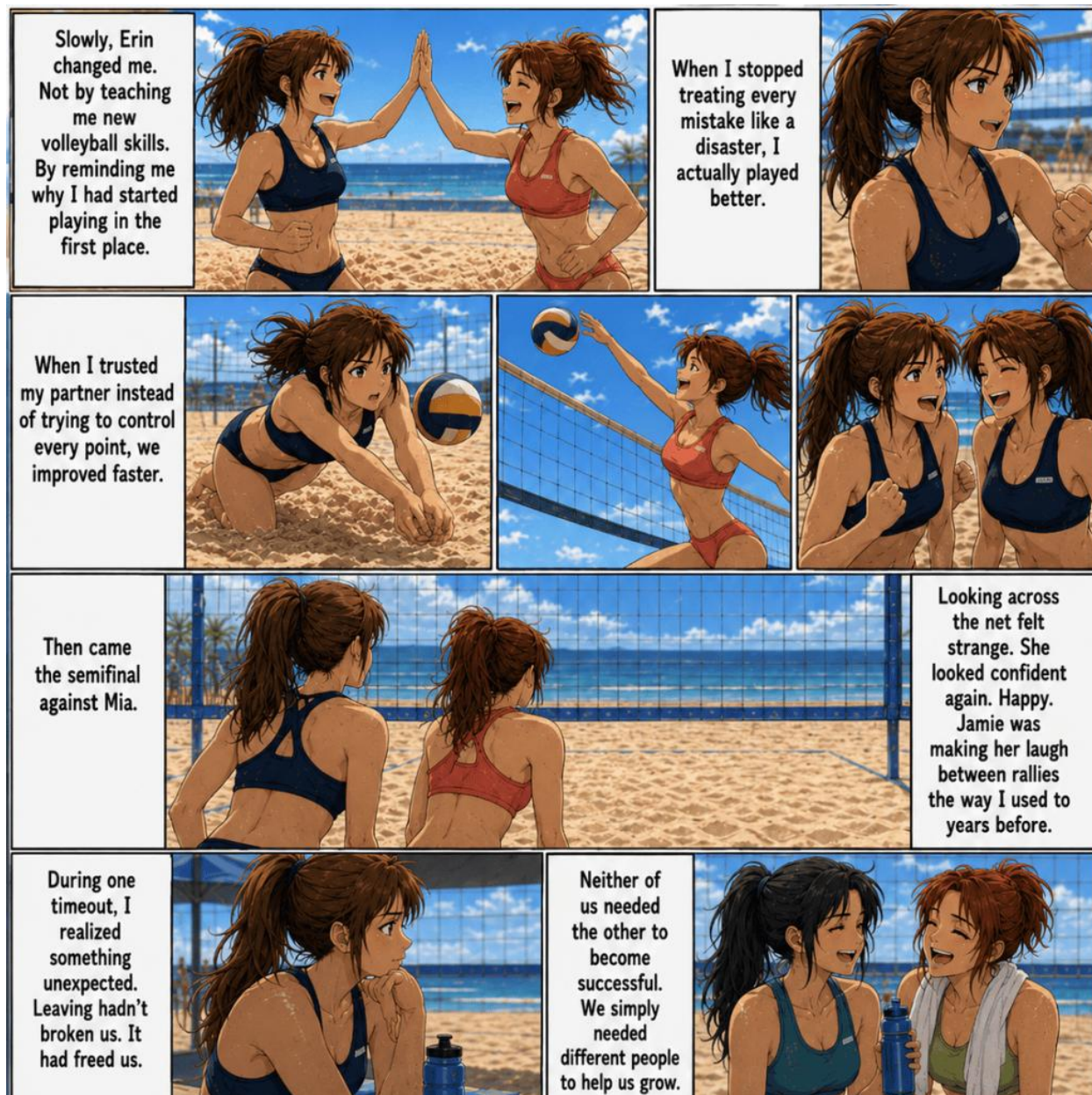


We stopped  
trusting each other.

Not because either  
of us had changed.  
Because fear had.







For years  
I thought  
great teammates  
stayed together  
forever.  
  
Now I know  
that's not always  
true.



The best teammates  
are the ones who  
help each other  
become better  
people—even if  
one day that journey  
leads them in  
different directions.



If you're  
a young athlete,  
remember this:



Not every  
ending is  
a betrayal.



Not every  
goodbye is  
failure.

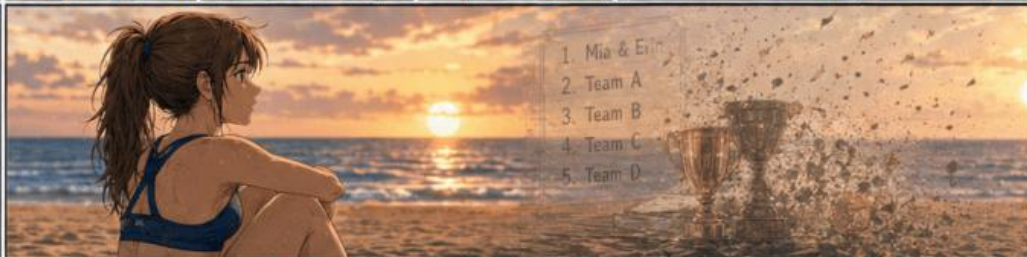


Sometimes  
courage isn't  
holding on.

Sometimes courage is  
letting go with kindness,  
wishing someone well,  
and believing there's  
enough success for  
both of you.



Because long after  
the trophies fade  
and the rankings  
disappear, people  
won't remember  
only how many  
matches you won.



They'll remember  
how you treated  
the people who  
once stood beside  
you on the same  
side of the net.



Thank you  
for reading.



