**The Pep-full Rally**

# **Unit 4**

Zach’s euphoria from having made new friends and his and Brian’s summer success was beginning to wane. Now that he was back in school, everything seemed to be going back to the way it had been last year. Brian wasn’t in any of his classes this year, so he had no friends to lean on when situations grew difficult. And many difficult situations arose because he was still known as the homeless boy! Even though he tried to do everything right – he never wandered down the **wayward** path like other kids in his situation – nothing helped his situation.

He knew he had to snap out of this doldrums, and the only person he knew who could help him out with that was Brian. He picked up the phone.

 “Brian, it’s me, Zach.”

“How are you doing, Zach?” Brian asked enthusiastically.

That’s what Zach loved about Brian. He always sounded like he was really happy to hear from Zach.

“To be honest, not very well at all,”

“Talk to me, buddy.”

“I feel like I’m back in the same old rut I was in last year. Things don’t ever seem to change for the better, no matter how hard I try,” Zach whined.

“Whenever I feel like that, my grandma says it because I’m only focusing on myself. She would tell you that you need to focus on others if you want things to change,” Brian explained.

“That sounds right, but who do I focus on? Any suggestions?”

“I think it needs to be a person or group that is doing something great but aren’t receiving the recognition,” Brian suggested.

“You mean kind of like the girls’ field hockey team that is undefeated, but no one talks about them?” Zach asked tentatively.

“I didn’t even realize that. How did you know?” Brian was impressed.

“Oh, Gloria – you know Gloria – she’s in my class, and she mentions her disappointment occasionally.”

“Zach, you old dog you!” Brian exclaimed.

“It’s nothing like that. She doesn’t even know who I am.”

“Perhaps we could change that. How about you and me forming an **alliance** with the purposes of making you known to her and relieving her disappointment of being invisible as an athlete?” Brian suggested.

“Do you really think we could do that?” Zach was growing excited now.

“You bet! Here’s the plan!”

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Zach and Brian decided to ask Mike to join their team. There is strength in numbers. Standing before the principal and the teaching staff at the faculty meeting required all the strength they could muster. But, the boys reached inside themselves and pulled out the strength to lay out their plan for a pep-rally they wanted to hold on the day of the final field hockey game of the season. The girls would be playing their biggest rival, and their undefeated season would be on the line.

They never realized how **controversial** the idea would be. As soon as they brought it up, teachers complained about missing class time and having to keep the entire student body under control in the gymnasium. One person even had the gall to mention that it was a girls’ team anyway, so why the big fuss.

The boys were growing discouraged until Mrs. Volare, the students’ favorite teacher, stood up and spoke in their defense.

“I’m going to ignore that ignorant, sexist comment. I want to make it know that I am completely in favor of this plan. I realize it is not **orthodox** compared to the way we usually run things around here, but the girls on the hockey team have achieved an outstanding level of success. They should be recognized for their work ethic and teamwork.”

As Mrs. Volare sat down, the majority of the faculty broke into applause. Those who had been opposed realized they were in the minority and began clapping also, showing they held no hard feelings.

The boys looked at each other and broke into huge smiles. They knew they had won.

\* \* \*

It was Monday. The game and pep rally were scheduled for Thursday. The boys had their work cut out for them. They needed to enlist an emcee, who they all agreed should be Mrs. Volare. They needed to **procure** all the materials they would need for signs and decorations. They wanted to make confetti bags for all the students, so they needed to contact everyone with a shredder in the district.

All those tasks were handled quite smoothly. They had all of their supplies collected by Tuesday evening. They were confident all the signs and decorations would easily be ready for Thursday. The area that caused them the most angst was recruiting other students to participate in the production of the rally. They found themselves having to **void**, invalidate, or negate many of the excuses given for not participating. Eventually they were able to convince enough students of the rally’s merits to fill out their cast of characters.

The number of those who were **hostile** to the whole idea was slowly dwindling. The boys could actually feel the building excitement within the student body. They took that as a positive sign and reinforced their efforts to pull off the best-ever pep rally the middle school ever held!

Zach’s and Brian’s nervousness was quite visible when the big day arrived. Mike, on the other hand, was a **virtual** rock of calm. Nothing seemed to faze him. The boys stationed themselves at the double doors to the gymnasium as the announcement blasted over the PA system for all students and teachers to report to the gymnasium for the pep rally.

The boys’ faces fell as they watched the majority of students walk **soddenly** into the gym. The sense of excitement they had felt before vanished in the face of this indifference. Zach even heard several students asking each other why the school had to **inflict** this kind of punishment on them. Wasn’t school bad enough already?

Everyone took their seats. The principal introduced Mrs. Volare as the emcee for the rally. As she walked to the middle of the gym floor, a **malignant** silence spread throughout the room. It seemed the entire school had conspired to ruin the day with bad attitudes.

Mrs. Volare ignored the silence of the students and in her bubbly way, informed everyone that a special treat had been prepared for them.

“Please welcome the high school football team, the girls’ field hockey team, and the varsity cheerleaders!”

The students initially just sat **bewildered**, wondering why high school students would come to a middle school pep rally.

As the high schoolers rushed into the gym, a few students began to catch the excitement. Then it was like a wave through the ocean. Soon everyone jumped to their feet clapping and hollering. The high schoolers took that enthusiasm and ran with it. They encouraged the whole crowd to participate in a **spirited** cheer for the girls.

As the cheering began to slow, Mrs. Volare announced, “And now, here is your undefeated middle school girls’ field hockey team!”

The crowd went wild again as the team members **scurried** onto the gym floor. The girls stood in awe as they glanced around at the raucous crowd. Some of the girls were so overcome with emotion that their eyes filled with tears. The days leading up to the rally had done nothing but **dishearten** them as they overheard comments from students about having to attend a “stupid” pep rally. This display of support was unexpected.

Gloria, the team captain, walked over to Zach, grabbed him by the arm, and pulled him to center court with the rest of the team. In front of the entire school, Gloria explained that the girls had been really hesitant to participate in the pep rally when first approached. Usually there is so little enthusiasm for girls’ sports, especially field hockey, that they saw their participation as **fruitless**. It would never be beneficial for the team. But, Zach had convinced her that it would be great. Since he and Brian and Mike had put their hearts and souls into the preparations, the whole team felt floored by the support.

Gloria leaned over and planted a kiss on Zach’s cheek. Zach turned so red that everyone could see it from the stands. She didn't do it to **mortify** him, but Brian could see that Zach looked quite uncomfortable.

To keep Zack from making a **buffoon** or clown of himself, Brian rushed out to center court, grabbed Gloria’s and Zach’s arms, and raised them to the sky in a virtual sign of triumph. The students exploded with excitement. The high school participants took that opportunity to lead them in several more cheers.

Mike walked out to his two buddies and pounded fists with them. “I knew it was in the bag!”

The hockey team circled around the three boys and yelled their game cheer for them.

Gloria looked at Zach, winked, and mouthed, “Thank you.”

The attention made Zach **wince** and go weak in the knees.

Brian laughed, looked at Zach, and, with a grin, asked, “How are things going for you now?”

--Ron Powers

**UNIT 4 - VOCABULARY**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **WORD** | **DEFINITION in your own words from context clues** | **MEMORY TRIGGER** |
| wayward |  |  |
| alliance |  |  |
| controversial |  |  |
| orthodox |  |  |
| procure |  |  |
| void |  |  |
| hostile |  |  |
| virtual |  |  |
| sodden |  |  |
| inflict |  |  |
| malignant |  |  |
| bewildered |  |  |
| spirited |  |  |
| scurry |  |  |
| dishearten |  |  |
| fruitless |  |  |
| buffoon |  |  |
| mortify |  |  |
| wince |  |  |