

## Jeff's Tryout

"Yeah baby, nice shot Jeff." Joey shouts.

Jeff would have heard this but he can't. Jeff is deaf. When he was four he got two bad ear infections that gradually ate away tissue in his ear. He was completely deaf at age seven. His parents could not afford the surgery that could have saved him. And they still can't afford it now. But Jeff kept going to public school. He kept his dream alive, the dream of playing professional soccer in England. Most people scoff at the idea of a deaf person playing professional sports, but Jeff has never backed down from a challenge and he does not plan to back down now. He wants to be treated like a regular person but he is mistreated by many of his classmates. His tenacity and determination keep him afloat. His desire to win is like no other player. He wants it more than all of the others. And he seeks out opportunities to make himself known to all. The first step is making the high school freshman soccer team.

He has just scored a goal in a scrimmage. Joey is celebrating like it's a real game. But Jeff knows that it is a long try out. And one goal does not change much. He knows that things can change in a blink of an eye. Yet so far he is happy with his performance. He wants to keep playing but the coach calls them in. He doesn't notice until the other boys start to jog in to the huddle. He catches up and arrives just in time for the coach's speech. Jeff tries to read coach's lips but coach turns left to right addressing all of the players. Jeff walks around the huddle trying to get a good look at coach but he can't. But this doesn't phase him a bit.

"Bring it in boys," he hollers, "Last day for tryouts is tomorrow so be ready!" Jeff and Joey leave the field together.

"How do you think you did Jeff?" Joey inquires. Jeff keeps on walking because he cannot hear him.

"Oh sorry I forgot," Joey says apologetically. This time Jeff reads his lips and gives him a "thumbs up". Joey smiles as they hop into his van. Jeff is getting a ride home from Joey because Joey is his only close friend. People usually stay away from Jeff because they think that he cannot communicate or show any emotion whatsoever.

The van pulls up to Jeff's house.

"Bye," Jeff says. That is one of the only words he can say. Joey puts on his fake smile that he always wears. It makes people think that he is happy but he is not. It is mostly because of his parents. Jeff's father is usually too drunk to stand up. He yells and hits and taunts Jeff. Jeff doesn't like it. He loves his father but wishes he would just sober up for once. But Jeff's mom is different. She is working two jobs to bring in income for the family. She never complains because she knows that her son, Jeff, has it worse off. Jeff walks into his house and immediately smiles. His mom is home and this makes him happy. He grabs his whiteboard and starts writing everything down that happened that day. His mom reads it, erases it and writes back

The board reads, "I'm so happy for you. Now get ready for bed so you will be rested for final cuts." Jeff scampers up the stairs, showers and falls asleep.

Jeff wakes up early the next morning. When he walks down the stairs, he sees his father yelling at his mother. So Jeff grabs his backpack and sneaks out the front door.

The school day has been a blur for Jeff. All he is thinking about is the tryout. Everything pales in comparison to soccer. All he can think about is the ball at his feet. The school day is over and he heads to the field. He scans his competition. All are worthy of spots on the team except for a few. The coaches must make 10 cuts to trim the roster down to 16. Jeff will give everything to be one of those 16. The tryout starts out with warm-up and stretching. Then they immediately go into a full field scrimmage. Jeff works his tail off and runs harder than everyone else, but the ball does not stay close to his feet like usual. As usual he can feel the coaches' eyes burning into him as they see him make mistake after mistake. The coaches scribble down some last minute notes then dismiss the team. Jeff is disappointed in his performance but still feels like he is better than many of the other players. Jeff believes that he will be on the team. He can almost taste it.

Jeff does not get a ride home from Joey today because Joey is going to swimming practice. So Jeff walks home. The long rocky road is familiar to him. He likes being alone. That way he does not feel left out because there is nothing to be left out from. He usually gets left out at school. Jeff is very intelligent and loves to read. His teachers

appreciate him but his peers do not. This makes Jeff sad but he does not let it slow him down at all.

After twenty minutes of walking and thinking, Jeff arrives at his house. Nobody is home because his dad is at the bar and his mom is working at the factory. He turns the key and he walks in to his house and sees that there is one message on the answering machine. He knows that he cannot listen to it. And he knows that it is the coaches calling home. So he waits in painful suspense for what feels like years but is only half an hour. He feels hunger but that does not mean anything to him now. All he wants is to hear the news, maybe not hear maybe just know the news. The suspense is killing him. His palms are sweaty and he paces back and forth around his kitchen thinking and sweating like never before. Then his mom waltzes in the door. He rushes to her and smiles his great smile.

“Hi, Honey. How was your day?” she asks. Jeff smiles and points to the answering machine excitedly. His mom plays the message. After a few seconds the smile is wiped off face. She tries to make a fake smile but it is not believable whatsoever. Jeff knows what has happened. Jeff did not even have to read his mom’s lips. He has been cut. His lip starts to quiver and puts his head in his hands. He sprints up to his room and starts bawling. He can’t believe what has happened. He wanted it so bad. He needed it. It was the only thing he wanted. He stays in his room for the rest of the night and cries himself to sleep. All of the pain and suffering he had gone through and witnessed came out on that very night. He does not go to school the next day because he does not want to be embarrassed. He doesn’t want people to ask him anything. He just wants to be by himself. Just like he always does.

His anger turns to motivation as he thinks. Finally he comes to a conclusion that will change his life forever.

“I will never give up,” he thinks. “I will train harder. I will want it more and I will do any task in life for myself. I will never again look down in shame and think that I could have worked harder. I believe I will do this, I will never let anyone down ever again.”

Ten years later Jeff was drafted onto the LA Galaxy, a soccer team, and was given a huge amount of money. He used this money to get surgery on his ears and pay for an

addiction clinic for his father. His dad has now been sober for 10 months and is now a loving father to Jeff. Jeff fulfilled his dream. And for his mother she is now a wealthy lady living in Beverly Hills. She is not your average rich snob. She has the big house with the pool in the backyard that Jeff bought her she also owns a non-profit organization to help research child sicknesses. Her foundation dubbed as "Do a favor" has raised millions of dollars to increase awareness about childhood diseases. Jeff always finds time to visit her even in the busiest of times. He is in a lot of commercials for Gatorade and Nike. He thinks that this is great because he can tell his story to everyone everywhere and tell kids that are like him, that they can do anything they set their mind to and to never ever give up on your dreams. His peers now feel bad because they mistreated Jeff everyday. Some even come to his house to apologize. And to their surprise Jeff invites them in for dinner and they share some laughs and talk. And as for Joey, he is Jeff's agent and he loves it. He has made hundreds of thousands of dollars just by helping his friend. He is living his dream now. Yes it does sound a little cheesy yet their friendship is forever for them. Jeff has won two MLS titles and was the MVP of both title games. He has made 5 All-Star teams. The accomplishments for Jeff are great and the sky is the limit for him and he does communicate that to his fans, whether they can hear him, or not.