Now or Never

“Zero-Zero mentality girls.”

They all looked at me, expectantly. This was all new to me. They looked at me with nervousness, fear, faith, and determination.

“We’ve done it before. We can do it again. Remember our rules. Rule number one. Always keep a zero-zero mentality. Rule number two: Keep all fighting off the field. Rule number three: Don’t be afraid. We can do this. We-“

The whistle blows.

“Captains. Come up for the coin toss.”

Our captain and co-captain head over to the referee. We go over a few last minute strategies. Then they return.

“We defer to second. We’re kicking.”

“Alright, kicking team on the field. Everyone else, sidelines.”

And just like that, I’m in the game state. My heart pounding, faster than any racecar. My stomach drops into a void. There’s a constant mantra playing in my head.

*Don’t disappoint. Don’t disappoint. Don’t disappoint. Don’t disappoint.*

The whistle blows, snapping me out of my trance. It’s now or never. The ball is kicked and I take off faster than a kid in a toy store. A flag is pulled and we take our defensive positions. The game goes on and we play offense, seems to have gone by in a breeze. I snap back into reality.

“Huddle up girls!” I’m screaming at the top of my lungs. Now or never.

“Run reverse” Our final play. I’m calm, cool, and collected on the outside. On the inside, the mantra continues.

I motion for the ball and it’s in my hands. I pass it off. We gain yards. I’m told to score and I do. Three times. I’m gaining confidence. We continue playing. Before I know it, its halftime.

“So far so good girls,” says my coach.

We’re winning 21-0. Its good, but I can do better.

The whistle blows.

We line up. The ball is kicked and it’s coming at me.

“Let me get it. Let me get it.” Another freaking mantra. My teammate wants the ball. I could let her get it, but I want to prove I could do better. Now or never. I step in her path and catch the ball. I start sprinting. 10, 20, 30 yards. My flag is pulled. My team prepares for offense.

“HUDDLE UP”

“What’s our play?”

“DC”

I signal for the ball. I throw it to my receiver. Too far. My heart drops. As does the ball. I shake it off and signaled to redo the play. I’m hiked the ball. No one is open. I have no choice now or never. I run it. Left or right? I go left without thinking. Wrong choice. Shake it off again. At this point, I’m desperate to make this work. I signal for another redo. The ball is in my hands. No one is open. I can’t run. I try to buy time by running around. No one turns! Before I can act, my flag is pulled. We lose ten yards. My coach angrily calls for a time-out.

My team starts slamming me.

“You took too much time on that”

“I was open”

“Am I invisible to you?”

Then there’s my coach.

“What are you doing? You’re a mess out there!”

I step off to the side. My hands on my knees. I’m on the brink of tears. I’m actually sad during the game. I’m the little kid leaving the toy store without the brand new racecar. Then imp angry. I’m a bull staring at that stupid red blanket.

Do they not realize I got them here?

I scored all of our touchdowns!

The whistle blows. Now or never.

We set on the field. I signal for another redo. I have the ball. I throw it. We gain yards. I’m back. Then, all too soon. I have to run, try and score. It works. The game resumes with us getting an interception, and another touchdown. The whistle blows. Game Over.

We won.

We’re going to the championships.

It’s happening.

Now.