

Use “The Scene” to introduce “Conquering Cliques,” the High School Sunday school lesson for March 29, 2015. The lesson is found on page 23 of *High School Teacher* by Standard Publishing.

the SCENE

Viewing the latest news through the lens of Scripture

It’s March, and the madness of college basketball is sweeping the nation. People who’ve never even played the game get caught up in bracketology, Cinderella stories, and some of the nation’s biggest rivalries. But the big games aren’t limited to the NCAA. Head down to Waco, TX, and you’ll hear the buzz about the biggest game to ever hit the town—a game played by a bunch of “juvenile delinquents.”

The Gainesville State Tornados don’t have a lot of fans. As a matter of fact, they don’t really have any. No students from the school attend their games, and rarely do any family members. “My parents came to one game,” says one of the players. “But they didn’t come to the other ones because they didn’t have time.” Gainesville State is a correctional facility for felony offenders. One of the rare perks for especially good behavior is to leave the prison a few times a year to play basketball.

When the team from nearby Vanguard College Prep heard that they were scheduled to play Gainesville State, two players announced that they refused to play. They didn’t want to face a team with no fans. So they did something about it—something nobody saw coming.

Hudson Bradley and Ben Martinson asked the fans from Vanguard to cheer for Gainesville. “No one likes playing in an empty gym,” said one of them. “It just doesn’t seem right,” said the other. And it didn’t. When Gainesville players stepped off the bus and onto the court at Vanguard, they were greeted by cheering fans wearing Tornados T-shirts. They had their own cheerleaders, spirit signs, and even their own cheering section in the stands. Their names were announced before the game, and Vanguard students formed a tunnel for them to run through. For many Gainesville players, this was the first time anyone had ever cheered for them. By the end of the game, the whole crowd was rooting for the Tornados, even though they were down by more than 40 points. Said one of the Gainesville players after the game, “I’ll probably be an old man and still be thinking about this. I’ll remember this day for the rest of my life.”

“We all need someone to believe in us,” added Hudson. “We all need someone who knows our mistakes and loves us anyway.”

As students arrive, give each of them a copy of the above news story to read. After all teens have had the opportunity to read the article, discuss it in this way:

How is this story different than most stories you hear about competitive sports?

How do you think the encouragement and support impacted the Gainesville team?

Read the last quote from Hudson. Do you have someone like that in your life? Who?

The players from Gainesville weren’t used to feeling wanted, loved, or included. We’ve all felt the pain of being left out. Today we’re going to look at someone in the Bible who felt rejected, and then we’ll talk about how we can be more open and accepting of others.

To see more about this heartwarming story, visit YouTube.com and search “Gainesville Tornados.”