

## **THE BALL TOUCHED ME**

By Marion D. Hanks

I was at a stake on a Saturday night for the appointed meeting. We had held earlier meetings, and when the seven o'clock one approached, I happened to pass by a certain young man in a position of great responsibility in the stake. I said to him, "Brother, where do you wish you were? Where would you rather be than here?" He said, "Well, I am content to be here, at this meeting, Brother Hanks." I replied, "I think you would rather be someplace else. Where is it?" He said, "Well, to tell you the truth, my two sons are playing in the championship of the volleyball tournament right now, and I would kind of like to be there." I said, "What in the world are you doing here? Go on!" He answered, "You called the meeting." I said, "I uncall it for you. Go on. Be here at eight o'clock in the morning, and at ten you will be called on to speak. But go on and watch your boys."

He went. He came back at eight o'clock the next morning and spoke in the ten o'clock meeting. I will not try to repeat verbatim all that he said, but I want to tell you that I will never forget how I felt while he spoke. He wept. He said:

"Last night was a kind of a good night. My boys played on a team that won. The reason I am here blubbering, though, is not last night; it is because of a year ago last night when those boys played in the championship last year.

"They are just teen-agers, and they were so excited, and their parents were so excited, and their church leaders were so excited. They wanted to win. It had come down to the final game, all tied up. This was the game, the match, the championship. The score was thirteen to fourteen our favor, and we were serving.

"The ball went back and forth over the volleyball net, and then a great big kid on the other side jumped high and smashed a spike--that seemed like it was traveling a hundred miles an hour--right through our team and out of bounds. Well, pandemonium broke loose. This was our point, game, match, and championship. Everybody was yelling. The people were rushing out of the stands.

"Then a kind of cold wind swept through the clamor. People stood still and watched. There was one boy on our side of that floor who wasn't jumping up and down. He was my son. He was trying to get the attention of the referee, who had climbed down from his ladder where he watches at the level of the net. It became quiet enough that my son could be heard saying, to the referee, 'Sir, the ball touched me.' The referee said, 'What did you say?' He repeated, 'The ball touched me.' The referee climbed back up his ladder and threw the towel over--indicating service to the other team--and gave the opposing team the ball. They served the requisite points, won the game, the match, and the championship.

"There was no pandemonium this time. There was a strange quiet. Most eyes were on my boy. He stood there with his shoulders up. The first person to reach him was his brother, who put his arms around him. Then every member of his own team came up and put his arms around him, some of them shedding a tear. The boys on the other side didn't shout their cheers for the losers. They all came under the net and joined the circle with their arms around my son. Well, I am not blubbering up here this morning because our boys won or lost the championship--lost last year, won this year. I am weeping because I have the honor to be the father of a son who, under that kind of pressure, had the courage to say, 'Sir, the ball touched me.' ("The Manner of Happiness," *Speeches of the Year*, 1971, pp. 6-7).