

A Retired Engineer Gets Benchwarmers in the Game

Segment	Who	Copy
Intro	Joe Bock	<p>I really struggled with sports because it meant a lot to me and...but I was never good. I was what you'd call a perfect student. But when it came to go to the gym or recess time I never got to play because I never got picked and I...and it really affected me, you know.</p> <p>I wanted to be athletic more than anything else. I would give up being smart for being athletic in a second.</p>
		INTRO MUSIC
Podcast Overview	Andy Levine	<p>Welcome to Second Act Stories, a podcast that looks at people who have made major life changes and are pursuing more rewarding lives in a second act. The stories are in their own words and the words of friends and family that helped them find a new path.</p> <p>I'm your host Andy Levine. Every two weeks we bring you a new, second act story. And today's episode is an incredible, "feel-good" story.</p> <p>Joe Bock retired ten years ago after a long and successful career as an electrical engineer. But he always remembered his time back in grade school as a kid sitting on the sidelines and never getting into an athletic game. And when he retired he was determined to help "kids like me."</p> <p>So at 74 years old, he now runs a program called "Benchwarmer Basketball" that has a growing and faithful following in Los Angeles, California.</p>
		BASKETBALL SOUNDTRACK FROM CHEVIOTT HILLS RECREATION CENTER
	Andy	<p>I'm here at the Cheviott Hills Recreation Center in Los Angeles, California. The background noise we're listening to is a well-organized basketball practice. The coach has a group of a dozen kids in two lines doing a familiar lay-up drill.</p> <p>This is exactly the type of group that Joe Bock DOESN'T work with in his Benchwarmer Basketball program.</p> <p>But before we get to Benchwarmer Basketball, let's learn about Joe and his first act.</p>

	Joe Bock	I was an electronic engineer for all my life since college up until about 10 years ago when I was retired. And for about the last 10 years I had my own business with a partner. I worked really hard.
	Andy	So before we get to Benchwarmer Basketball I wanna take you even further back to your own upbringing and sports and, you know, to sort of...what kinda kid were you growing up?
	Joe	I was what you'd call a perfect student. I got straight As, you know, I behaved, okay. But when it came to go to the gym or recess time I never got to play because I never got picked and I...and it really affected me, you know. It kind of...because to the adults it wasn't important but to the other kids which is what mattered to me that was the most important thing. It's how good you are on the...at sports.
	Andy/Joe	Andy: So you struggled. Was it just it didn't come naturally to you or... Joe: It didn't come naturally, no. Not coordinated. I'm not naturally athletic. Andy: What grade are we talking about where you started... Joe: We're talking from kindergarten through high school. Andy: Did you participate in any organized sports during that period? Joe: I'm pretty old so there wasn't...I don't think there was that much organized sports. I wasn't aware of any organized sports. Andy: But is more just sort of pick-up games and that kind of thing? Joe: Yeah, it was just pick up game at recess and even gym time. What they called official gym time, the teachers would just let us out and say, "Pick your own teams and go play," Whilst I just wound up sitting on the side the whole time.
	Joe	Sometimes we would go to a park, a baseball field. They would always put me in the outfield. They put me in right field where nothing happens.
	Andy	When did the idea of Benchwarmer Basketball come to you? When did it emerge?

	Joe	<p>Well, I always thought that I wanted to do something. I mean, even from the time I started working that I wanted to do something to help kids I would fantasize about it all the time. I wanted to help kids that were like me.</p> <p>So when I finally retired I decided I'm gonna do something about it.</p>
	Andy	<p>Was there something that prompted you? I mean, just, you know, where did that thought come from?</p>
	Joe	<p>Oh, because I've been thinking about it all my life. So I said, "Now that I'm retired I'm gonna do it."</p> <p>But I didn't know exactly what to do. I just wanted to help kids. I didn't think of anything like Benchwarmers specifically.</p>
	Andy	<p>It wasn't an easy path.</p>
	Joe	<p>I spent about two years banging my head against the wall. I went to the Bureau of Jewish Education to see if they could do...to help me get involved. And so they got me involved with special needs kids who were...like behavior problems, okay. But they were athletic. And that wasn't what I wanted to do.</p> <p>So I went to a bunch of schools. I actually volunteered at a bunch of schools and...but nothing really worked out.</p>
	Andy	<p>He decided to go back to school to study kinesiology, which according to Joe is the politically correct word for physical education.</p>
	Joe	<p>I took a bunch of courses at Cal State Northridge here in Los Angeles, to learn how to work with kids. You know, there were like courses that had practicums where I would go to elementary schools or high schools. I took six courses and that really taught me a lot about how to organize large groups and stuff and also when I did that I would always focus on the kids that were not athletic. So it taught me how to reach them.</p>
	Andy	<p>Dr. Jay Froehlich, the head of Cal State's kinesiology gave Joe some terrific advice.</p>
	Joe	<p>He told me, "Don't go to schools." And he was so right. If you go to a park they'll know what you wanna do like right away and he was so right about that.</p>
	Andy	<p>So he started approaching recreational parks in the Los Angeles area. The first two said "no." But then he approached Randy Rosen who heads the basketball program at the Cheviott Hills Recreation Center.</p>

	Joe	He was gung-ho about it. He said, "This is the greatest thing since chopped liver. These kids need their own session so they could have a chance to really play. So he fought for it so they established it.
	Andy	They put it in the Park's bulletin of programs. And the first time around, only girl signed up for the session.
	Joe	So the one kid came and I said to Randy, I said, "Well, I guess it's not working. Nobody's responding." He said, "No, no. Work with that kid and next semester we'll put it in the bulletin again."
	Andy	What happened next semester?
	Joe	The next semester I think we had like about eight kids.
	Andy	And so that was really where it started?
	Joe	Yeah. That was really where it started and then it was mostly word of mouth after that.
	Andy/Joe	<p>Andy: In that first group, the first group of eight kids did you at some point say, "Yes, I've got a program here. I've got something that works."</p> <p>Joe: Yeah. Right away.</p> <p>Andy: So how did that make you feel when you saw that, you know, "Gosh, I've been thinking about this for a long time, I've been really working to do this and suddenly it works."?</p> <p>Joe: Well, you know, in my wildest dreams I never thought that I would do what I've been fantasizing about all my life. But I did it. So that's how it made me feel.</p>
	Andy	Tell me what a typical session looks like now and just paint a picture for our audience what it looks like.
	Joe	<p>Okay. Well, first of all I have two groups. A younger one and an older one. The younger one is like from 7 to 10 and the older one is from 11 to 14. Okay. I always get a lot more kids in the younger group. Like the last session I had about 25 kids in the younger group and maybe 15 kids in the older group.</p> <p>So I do a drill first, like either do dribbling or passing or shooting or whatever. You really can't learn to play a team sport like basketball by doing drills. The only way you're gonna learn is by playing, you know. But I do a drill at the beginning because the kids can do the drills well much better than they can play. So it builds up their confidence doing it. And it's also very social, the drills. So I do drills for about 10 minutes.</p>

		And then I sit the kids in a circle in the middle of the gym. I don't have to do anything. I blow the whistle and they run to the circle.
	Andy	Kind of programmed.
	Joe	They're programmed like Pavlov's dog, you know. And I take attendance mostly because I want the kids to know everybody's name and everything. And then I divide them up into groups. So we have enough for two full court games and I have a lot of the parents help me. So at this point now I don't do anything. I just assign the groups to the different parents and I walk around between the groups.
	Andy	And there's no picking teams?
	Joe	In Benchwarmers I never let the kids pick their own teams.
	Andy	So it goes on for an hour?
	Joe	Well, yeah. The whole session is an hour They don't wanna go when it's over. These kids don't get a chance to play normally because they're kind of not chosen and nobody pays attention to them with their peers. So here they have a chance to play. And some of them have gotten really good. You know, much better than I could ever imagine.
	Andy	I asked Joe if I could interview a parents of one of the kids he works with. Scott Facher has twin boys, Miles and Leo, and both were in the Benchwarmer Basketball program for about three years.
	Scott Facher	Number 1, they need their hand-held a little bit that I think most kids aren't going to get when they are introduced to a team sport just by virtue of the numbers. When I say their hand-held I guess I mean individual attention. You know, they were never the kids who it's like there's a ball, go play.
	Andy	Scott shared a conversation that his son Miles had with his Mom after being in Benchwarmer Basketball for about a year.
	Scott	I didn't remember this until she told me recently. But she said when he was in third grade, he said to her "Mom, remember when I said I didn't like sports. It's not that I didn't like sports, it's just that I always thought I'd be really bad at them."

	Andy/Joe	<p>Andy: Among the different things you've done in your life...I mean, is this as rewarding as I think...</p> <p>Joe: This is it.</p> <p>Andy: And how long do you think you'll keep doing this?</p> <p>Joe: Well, as long as I'm healthy but what I really want is for other people to do it.</p>
	Joe	<p>I've got this thing going and everything is great. And only about two years ago one of the parents asked me what I wanted to do next. The same question that you're asking sort of in a way. Okay. And I said, "I'd like to expand this to other parks because there's a million kids out there that have..." This is a problem that society doesn't pay any attention to which is a big problem. And she says, "Okay. We're making a video."</p>
	Andy	<p>I've viewed the video and it's fantastic. It's about six minutes long. There is a link to it from our website, SecondActStories.org under this episode "A Retired Engineer Gets Benchwarmers in the Game." And it really gives you a deeper sense of what Joe and the families at the Chevoitt Hills Recreation Center have built.</p> <p>And Joe would love to help find someone else start "Benchwarmer Basketball" at another recreation center in Los Angeles or anywhere in the United States.</p>
	Joe	<p>So my biggest problem is finding somebody and I think it needs to be somebody that's not working.</p>
	Andy	<p>Someone like yourself I guess.</p>
	Joe	<p>Right, that has the time. Somebody like me, somebody that maybe wasn't that good at sports as a kid who's probably motivated but anybody that would be willing to do it.</p>
	Joe	<p>Can I give my email address?</p>
	Andy	<p>Absolutely. Let's do that. So if someone is interested in doing this, how should they contact you?</p>
	Joe	<p>They can just email me. My email is joebock3@yahoo.com. That's J-O-E-B-O-C-K, the number three @yahoo.com.</p>

	Andy	<p>Okay. Let me take you in a little different direction here, Joe.</p> <p>So leaving Benchwarmer Basketball for a moment, if you were just trying to give someone advice who wanted to do something like what you've done. They've retired but they have this idea like what you had and maybe it's in a completely different area. What advice would you give them about starting something new in retirement?</p>
	Joe	<p>You really gotta be persistent. If it's one thing I have it's persistence. If you don't have the persistence, if you can't knock down walls, you know, and just face a lot of rejection at first then it's not gonna work.</p>
	Andy	<p>Because you had to go through several schools, some parks, you had to go back to school, you had to talk to lots of different people and then finally in Randy you found the guy who was willing to try this?</p>
	Joe	<p>Yes. I owe him my life.</p>
	Andy	<p>Joe has done a lot for the dozens of kids that have been through Benchwarmer Basketball. But in a way the biggest compliment comes from the parents of the kids he works with.</p>
	Joe	<p>One mother just told me that her...a kid that just started about a year ago that after...about half way through the first session she sent me an email saying, "This is the first time my kid ever felt normal on a sports field."</p>

		OUTGOING MUSIC
Thank-You and Show Credits	Andy	<p>Of course, we want to thank Joe Bock for opening up and telling us the story of Benchwarmer Basketball. He has created something really fantastic at the Cheviott Hills Recreation Center.</p> <p>So if you think this kind of a program would work well in your community, he'd love to work with you to get one started. Again his email is JoeBock3@yahoo.com.</p> <p>I also want to thank Sarah McKinney of Encore.org for making the introductions and connecting me with Joe.</p> <p>If you know of a "Second Act Story" that we should profile, please contact me, that's Andy Levine, at SecondActStories@gmail.com. I'd love to hear from you.</p> <p>And if you are thinking of starting your own second act, we hope Joe's story of what my own father used to call "DAP" – Dumb, Animal Persistence -- will help you find a new path.</p> <p>Now to close things out, I want to take you back to something Joe said earlier in this episode:</p> <p>"Sometimes we would go to a park, a baseball field. They would always put me in the outfield. They put me in right field where nothing happens."</p> <p>So back in 1986, Peter, Paul and Mary recorded a song written by a man named Willie Welch called "Right Field." It's only three minutes long but it's the perfect way to end today's episode. I hope you enjoy it as much as I do.</p>
		<p style="text-align: center;">CLOSE WITH "RIGHT FIELD" AS PERFORMED BY PETER, PAUL AND MARY</p>