

1

REBEL RULES

Charlie Joyce cradled the puck at the left hash marks. With the man advantage, he wanted to take his time and set it up properly. He faked a pass to the point to force the winger higher, then curled down low towards the corner. His linemates recognized the play and jumped into action; they had practised it a hundred times. Zachary Jackson, his right winger, peeled off from in front of the net and headed to the opposite corner. Charlie banked the puck off the back wall onto his stick. His other winger, Pudge Moretti, stormed the net to occupy a defender, using his powerful frame to get close to the goalie.

The Rebels' left defenceman, Spencer Bowman, a smooth-skating offensive star, was new to the team this season. He cut decisively into the high slot to force the winger to cover him. Charlie circled to the blue line. Zachary faked a pass to Spencer, then slid the puck to the right point where Nick Katsopoulos, a wizard with the puck in his own right, took it easily, raised his stick for a slapshot to freeze the centre who had come out to pressure him, and passed it across to Charlie.

Pudge pushed against the defender, exposing the bottom left corner of the net. It was a perfect screen. Charlie didn't hesitate, sending a laser-like one-timer on net.

The crowd let out a roar — another Rebels goal!

Charlie loved to score; what player doesn't? But there would be greater challenges this season than getting the seventh goal in a 6–0 game. The Tornadoes were the worst team in the league.

Nick held his glove out. "Personally, I would have blasted the puck under the crossbar, just a fraction of a centimetre off the post," he said, "but I guess a shot to the bottom corner when the goalie is completely screened is good enough for you."

"I take 'em any way I can," Charlie said.

Spencer tapped his shin pads. "Third power-play goal this period," he said. "Tornadoes might wanna think of playing by the rules."

"This is fun, dudes," Zachary said. He and Charlie punched gloves.

Pudge patted Charlie on the helmet.

"The screen made it easy," Charlie said to his left winger and best friend. "It was your goal more than mine."

Pudge laughed. "I already told the ref to give it to me. Anyone can shoot one-timers from the point. It takes real talent to stand in front of the net like a statue."

They went to the bench for a change. Scott Slatsky jumped over the boards. He was Nick's defence partner, but lately Spencer had taken his place on the power play. Scott was a stay-at-home defender, and one of the best in the league. He was also too good-natured to mind.

But this time he was shaking his head and didn't look at all happy.

"What's up?" Charlie asked him.

"It took you thirty-two seconds to score," he said. "That's not acceptable. Coach Hilton's so nice he won't say something, so I have to. We all know the Rebels won their first four games of the season because of me. So if we're going to remain undefeated, you're going to have to pass to me all the time — and I should be captain — and probably coach. I guess I'm just an all-around awesome player."

Charlie sighed. Would he ever learn not to take Scott seriously?

Nick looked taken by surprise. "I didn't know you were on the team," he said. "When did you join the Rebels?"

"Last season," Scott said.

"Weird. What position?"

"Defence. I'm with you."

Nick shrugged. "You must be really useless because I don't think you've ever touched the puck."

They skated to the blue line for the draw, while Charlie took a seat on the bench next to Pudge. Charlie grabbed a water bottle and took a long sip. The cold water burned the back of his throat. Like Zachary said, this was fun. He was playing with his buds, on maybe the strongest team in the league. Last year had been a struggle with only ten players. But winning the championship had attracted some attention. Spencer and his defence partner Philip rounded out the defence, which, with the twins, Christopher and Rob, gave them three great pairings. Nazem, Brandon and Will formed a

potent new line, so now the Rebels had three forward lines capable of scoring.

Coach Hilton tapped him on the shoulder. “I liked the puck movement,” he said. “Nice read to move to the point.” He leaned closer. “Perhaps a touch faster getting it to Zachary,” he added, before moving away.

Charlie and Pudge exchanged a glance. That was classic Hilton. No matter how perfect, he always wanted more. Of course, Charlie loved him for that. He was the best coach in the league — at least in Charlie’s opinion — and a great English teacher too. Charlie had him for grade ten at Terrence Falls High School.

Matt’s line had taken the ice, with Dylan on the right and Jonathon on the left. Nick whipped the puck cross ice to Scott, who one-timed it to Matt, cutting hard to open space. He took it on his backhand and slipped in between the Tornadoes’ front line. Dylan came off his wing and Matt snapped a pass to him. He took it without breaking stride, and beat the Tornadoes’ right defenceman to the outside. The other defenceman came over to cut him off, and Dylan flipped the puck over his stick to Matt streaking up ice. Matt took two steps and blasted the puck from the slot. The goalie did not even move.

CLANG.

“I can’t believe that,” Pudge said, slapping the top of the boards. “That’s the third post he’s hit this game.”

“Let him save the goals for our next game against the Wildcats,” Zachary said. “These dudes are done.”

Jonathon and a Tornadoes defender battled for possession in the right corner.

Charlie couldn’t agree with Zachary more. The

Rebels had played the Wildcats in the finals last year. Jake Wilkenson was their captain, and Charlie's least favourite person in the world.

"The Wildcats should've been suspended from the league," Pudge said. "Coach Schultz pulls his team off the ice — in the finals no less — and he's allowed to keep coaching? Crazy."

"He's been coaching a long time," Zachary said. "He's got friends."

"What he's got is problems," Charlie said, grinning, "because his team's gotta play the Rebels."

"Ain't that the truth!" Zachary said, and they punched gloves.

Charlie looked up in time to see Matt lift the puck over the Tornadoes' fallen goalie.

"Finally," Zachary said. "The curse has lifted."

"Change 'em up," Hilton called out.

Charlie shifted down. He could hardly wait to get back out. He felt a little bad for the Tornadoes, though. At this rate, the game would end 15–0.

"Let's not try too hard to score," Charlie said to his linemates. "This game is out of control." They both nodded. "I'll tell the others," he added.

As captain Charlie figured it was his responsibility. As cool as it was to be winning, the Rebels were not show-offs, and he did not want them to turn into that kind of team.