

Squeeze Play had its world premiere at the Mile High Theatre, Hoboken, NJ, in June 2013 as part of a benefit called "7th inning Stretch" (in a version that featured a "Mom" instead of a "Dad"). It was directed by Chris O'Connor.

COACH Victor Slezak
MOM Barbara Pitts

Silence. Darkness.

Two men standing on a baseball field. Local park sort of backstop.
not a professional situation.

One man (THE DAD) wearing Brooks Brothers casual. Another man (THE COACH) is decked out in training gear. Carrying a clipboard with forms.

DAD ... beautiful day.

COACH Uh-huh. It sure is.

The men stand quietly for a moment. Each staring off in different directions.

In fact, they should never look at each other throughout.

DAD ... I know what you're thinking.

COACH Yeah? (Beat.) What's that?

DAD No, I don't mean exactly—like, I'm a mind reader or something—
—I just mean in general. I know "the general" what you're thinking right now. How you're feeling.

COACH Is that so?

DAD Probably.

COACH And?

DAD You're disgusted. Right?

COACH Pretty much. Yep.

DAD I can tell.

COACH

DAD Well, that's what would you do?

COACH Me?

DAD Yes, I'm just saying . . . in my situation?

COACH I dunno.

DAD Yes you do. (Beat.) I'm not being rude . . . I'm just saying that I can tell you think I'm an asshole for asking you this so you must have an idea of what the right thing to do would be. (Beat.) True?

COACH I guess I do. Yeah.

DAD Which one?

COACH You know.

DAD Yeah, I probably do . . . I have an idea what you're going to

SAY What most people in this situation would say . . . like, what My dad would've said if he was you . . . (Beat.) I'm just curious

about what you're going to say.

The two men stand looking into the distance. Watching the boys practice across the great expanse of lawn in front of them.

COACH I'm gonna say I wish you'd never asked me this. I wanna say "Fuck you" and spit in your face and tell you that's not how we play this game and throw your kid off the team and make an example of him. And you. That's what I wanna do. And say. I would like to do that . . . right now. This minute.

DAD I see.

COACH That's what I'd expect to happen if I was a parent whose kid was on my team if you did this and I heard about it . . . I'd come to me and complain and point fingers and do everything I could—go down to see one of those people at the "Y" or over

at the City Hall . . . somewhere—and complain about you and your conduct . . . that's the kind of thing I'd expect of myself or other folks I know. If I found out about it.

DAD Okay. Fair enough. (Beat.) But that's not what you're going to do. Right? Is it?

COACH No. I don't suppose I am . . .

DAD And why is that?

COACH You know why.

DAD I guess I do.

COACH Yeah, I guess you do. In fact, I'm sure you do. (Beat.) I figure that's why you even had the balls to ask me this . . . to

have the guts to ask another man to do something like you're asking me here.

DAD Maybe so.

COACH Because you knew I'd have to think about it. I'd have to give it some very serious consideration, thanks to the place I find myself in currently. The state of my life at the present time (Beat.) So . . .

DAD It's a tough economy.

COACH Yeah, it certainly is.

DAD Hard to keep a job. Or find one again . . .

COACH Exactly.

DAD And money is tight. For families who are struggling . . . bills to pay . . .

COACH Yep.

DAD A kid in college.

COACH Exactly.

DAD I get that.

COACH Yeah? You do?

DAD I absolutely do . . . it's very hard these days. To make ends meet.

COACH But you're willing to help me with that.

DAD I am yes.

COACH You're...? What...? Tell me again?

DAD I'm happy to...you know...

COACH No, I don't. I don't know exactly because of the way you said it. Just sorta tossed it up in the air... like a screwball or a, you know, some kind of curve that you've thrown at me... just floating there over the plate. Waiting for me to take a swing at it.

DAD That's very poetic.

COACH Fuck you.

DAD I'm not trying to be funny! Just like the way you put it... that analogy it's true. I did kind of just drop it there. Like that.

DAD In your lap.

COACH Yeah, well—I guess you do what you gotta do.

DAD That's right. (Beat.) You do.

COACH Whatever.

(INT. DAD DUMPS AND LOOKS AT THE COACH. WATCHING HIM. THE COACH DOESN'T TURN TO MEET HIS GAZE.)

DAD And I do feel that...not that I have to but I need to. Want to, even I want to give my kid a chance... something I don't think I ever really got when I was his age... and my dad was even our coach! Or my little league team, isn't that crazy? He was the coach and he made me just sit there, watch the other guys play because they were better. (Beat.) He wanted to win more than he wanted me to play and learn and have fun. Dad wanted to win trophies and beat the other dads who weren't using *their* sons on *their* teams... that's how I grew up and I don't want

that for my kid. I want him to play now... this year. On a great team, even if he's not good enough or the best or anything like

that. *That* is what I'm willing to pay you to do. Is to make him feel like he's got a chance.

COACH I get it.

DAD Thanks.

COACH Doesn't mean I like it. Or like you for doing it...

DAD I understand.

COACH...but I get why you're doing it. It's a fucked up way of seeing things, but I do follow your line of thinking.

DAD I'm glad.

COACH It's just...he's never gonna make it. You know that, right?

DAD What do you mean?

COACH Your kid. (Beat.) I can tell, even at this age. Some guys, they grow into the game—not even that. "grow" into it but it's a thing where they just get better and they get bigger and faster and stronger and it just occurs. Suddenly you've got a really good little ballplayer on your hands. Or it happens in school, middle school or even in high school occasionally, it just happens and one of these boys'll become a major talent almost overnight, just outta nowhere. But not your son. No way. (Beat.) You're giving 'em hope that doesn't exist. We can do this... I can put him out there and I can listen to the other players and the moms and dads yelling at me, telling me I'm crazy for playing him, even out in right field they'll think I'm some sorta fucking nutjob for doing it... but this is it...right here. I don't even think he'll get on a team next year, the skills he's got. I just want you to know the truth...

DAD No, I know. I know it. (Beat.) Yes.

COACH You're just delaying this. The fact that this game's not for him.

DAD I get that. I do.

COACH Okay. Just so you do.

DAD Just . . . I wanna give him this *moment*. A few games where he's out there with his friends and . . . you know . . . gets to run out on the field with those guys, not just be on the bench, sitting there, watching . . . waiting . . . hoping that he might catch your eye and that you'll play him for a couple minutes this game. Of course that you *will* . . . because he knows that he's not good enough and you've done nothing to build him up and so then he drops a ball or strikes out and all of those people who come to watch these damn things—to whom it's SO important that their neighborhood team does well—it'll laugh at my kid. He is mocked and laughed at and . . . NO! I do not want that happening to him. Not now. At least not this year. No.

THE COACH Waves at someone nearby. Laughs at something said to *him*. **THE DAD** *Coughs*. Finally the **COACH** turns to him again.

COACH If you'll, though)

DAD *Hmmph*?

COACH If I play your boy . . . he's gonna make a bunch of mistakes . . . that's gonna happen to him. It's gonna happen a *lot*. I mean, come on. You know it is.

DAD Yes, but you'll keep him in. You'll keep him out there and that's the difference. He'll play and he'll get better and he'll have a chance. For at least one season . . . he'll have the opportunity to play. As a member of this team . . . as one of the guys. (Beat.) That's what I'm paying you for . . .

COACH I guess. (Beat.) Don't be surprised if I make him *bunt* a lot. Use him for squeeze plays . . . that sorta thing.

DAD I won't be

COACH Alright then.

DAD And he'll look up to you . . . you will be a role model to him forever . . . for the rest of his life. It happens. You *know* that.

COACH Yeah. It does. I know.

DAD So let it then . . . just let that happen. I don't care what it costs.

COACH Ok. If that's what you want and you don't care what people say . . . then alright. (He shrugs.) See how it goes, I guess . . .

THE DAD nods his head. Smiles at someone *far off*. Waves.

DAD He loves the new uniforms . . .

COACH Yeah, they're pretty cool. With all the red stripes there. On the sleeves.

DAD Yes, I like 'em, too.

COACH Great. (Beat.) My wife designed 'em.

DAD Nice.

THE DAD keeps looking over to where someone is across the park. **THE COACH** watches him.

COACH And . . . so . . . ?

DAD I'll take care of it. We don't need to discuss that right now. Do we?

COACH . . . well . . .

DAD Not today. On the first practice.

COACH I guess not. No. But just so . . . we're . . .

DAD We are.

They nod without looking at each other. **THE DAD** waves to someone in the distance again. Smiles more broadly.

COACH You ever just throw a ball around with him sometimes . . . in the yard? (Beat.) It does make a difference.

DAD I try to do that. I'm usually home late from work but I'll try to do it more.

COACH Alright. Good. Anything you can do to help me out here . . .

DAD Of course.

COACH People're gonna think I'm outta my mind! Just so you know.

DAD Maybe.

COACH Not "maybe." For sure.

DAD I don't care. I really don't. (Beat.) And you promise that you'll keep him playing no matter how he does? Whatever happens?

COACH I guess.

DAD No. Tell me for sure. That you will do that, no matter what.

COACH Yeah. Sure. I will. (Beat.) Yes.

DAD Fine.

COACH And you'll . . . ?

DAD Yes. (Beat.) A check's alright? Or . . . ?

COACH I'd prefer cash if you can.

DAD I'll make it cash.

COACH Good.

DAD Every which way.

COACH That'd be good.

DAD Fine.

COACH Or up front . . . If that's all . . . ?

DAD I'd rather do it once a week.

COACH Alright.

DAD Just to keep things . . . you know.

COACH Yeah.

DAD If you don't mind.

COACH Ok.

DAD Thank you. I mean that I do.

COACH . . .

DAD Anyway, just . . . (Beat.) Thanks

The two men keep looking into the distance. THE DAD turns and holds his hand out. THE COACH doesn't take it.

COACH I should probably get over there. Get the guys warming up—hand out these forms for all the physicals and stuff. Their tees.

DAD Sure.

COACH Okay.

DAD That's . . .

COACH Alright then.

THE COACH nods but doesn't move just yet. Another long moment of silence between them.

DAD . . . beautiful day.

COACH Uh-huh. It sure is.

THE COACH nods. Gives THE DAD one of the physical forms. THE COACH walks off. THE DAD waves to his kid again. He smiles at him and makes a gesture like he's batting the ball or catching the ball. Nods and smiles and waves.

THE DAD keeps watching his child in the distance. Very slowly the smile falls from his face.

Now he is just staring.

A peppy version of "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" begins to play in the distance.

Silence. Darkness.