

A Fight for Hurling

By ReadWorks

Patrick Wilson rushed through the back door with his backpack swinging back and forth across his shoulders. “I’m late I’m late!” he yelled to no one in particular, although his younger sister, Maeve, was sitting at the kitchen table and watching the whole ordeal. Her friend had just driven her home from school and Maeve was grabbing some food—carrots and hummus, her favorite—before soccer practice.

Five minutes later, Patrick came stumbling down the stairs dressed in a blue jersey and orange athletic shorts. He was carrying a bag full of sports equipment—a wooden stick, a small ball, helmet and a bottle of water.

“Alright, I’m off to hurling practice. I’ll see you later,” he called out to Maeve.

“Bye!” she said to his back—he had already disappeared through the doorway.

Maeve let out a sigh as she slid off the stool she was sitting on. She reluctantly got ready for her own sports practice, pulling her hair back into a tight knot, throwing on her soccer uniform, and wishing she was also on her way to the hurling field.

Even as a young girl, Maeve silently envied the boys who were able to play hurling. She and her brother had grown up in a predominantly Irish community in Boston, Massachusetts and hurling, an ancient Gaelic game, was ever so popular. To walk around her neighborhood at four in the afternoon was almost like walking through a battlefield: The streets were scattered with various hurling games, with young boys running at each other from all directions. Even though there is a similar game for women named camogie, it was hardly played by Maeve’s friends. They were more interested in other sports, or no sports altogether. So instead of finding a camogie team, Maeve watched all of her brother’s hurling games from the sidelines.

Both Maeve and Patrick arrived back at the house at 6:30 pm after their practices. Their dad had cooked dinner—pasta with sausage and vegetables. The two were ravenous. Maeve and Patrick bolted to the dinner table to sit in front of their steaming plates.

“So how was practice, guys?” their mom asked.

“Great!” Patrick said with a full mouth. “In the last ten minutes of the game I scored under the crossbar and put us over the other team by those three points,” he finished.

In a game of hurling, players could either score one point by hitting the ball, called a sliotar, over the crossbar of the opponents’ goalpost, or into a net for three points. They use wooden sticks, called hurleys, to hit the sliotar in the air or onto the ground.

The players can carry the sliotar, but only for four steps, after which they have to bounce the ball or hold it on the end of their hurley, which is flat on one side. Tackling is very common in the game, although it is strictly regulated. Since the players can get very aggressive, they are required to wear protective helmets to prevent serious head injuries.

“How about you, Maeve?” her mom asked. “How was soccer?”

Maeve stuffed a forkful of pasta into her mouth before she answered. “Mmm, fine,” she mumbled. Before she could be asked another question, she shoveled more food into her mouth.

“Come on, tell us what’s wrong. If you don’t want to be on the team, you don’t have to,” her mother assured her. Her father nodded his head in agreement.

“I wanna play hurling,” Maeve said quickly. She knew it wasn’t possible without a female team, let alone a camogie team. She hadn’t brought this up before since she knew that playing with the boys was not a possibility.

There was a short silence. Maeve had looked down while she mumbled her wish to play her brother’s game, but now she looked up at her family. Her mother’s lips slowly widened into a smile, and her father appeared to be concentrating very hard. Patrick stared ahead with blank eyes and a dropped jaw. Her mother finally broke the silence.

“Well then let’s find a way for you to do it!” she said, enthusiastically.

Her father hesitated. “Yes, that’s great, but it could get dangerous on the field for you to play, sweetheart,” he told Maeve.

“That’s why we wear the helmets though, Dad,” she answered with a hint of impatience in her voice.

They went back and forth for a while, debating the pluses and minuses of the attempt to allow Maeve to play hurling. After around 10 minutes, Patrick decided to chime in.

“Let me talk to my coach.” And with that, he ended the conversation.

Maeve spent the next week trying to forget about the discussion she had with her family that night at dinner. She attended each soccer practice with a smile on her face and cherished the time she could spend with her team members. She directed her focus toward her school classes and studied for the tests that were soon approaching. Simply put, she tried to distract herself from wanting to play hurling.

Then one morning, soon after a week had passed, Patrick excitedly approached his little sister during their lunch break.

“Maeve, Maeve!” he called out. “I have some good news!”

“Yeah?” she asked him.

“Coach O’Connor said that you can join our practices, but you have to wear some protective gear at first. And then, if you do well during practice, he said that he’ll try to get you to play a game!”

She didn’t say anything. After a few moments, she gave her brother a rib-crushing hug. Before he could pull away, she tore out of the cafeteria and started to jog toward the gym.

Coach O’Connor was sitting behind a mound of papers at his desk when Maeve came rushing in. It took her a few seconds to catch her breath.

“Yes, Wilson, how can I help you?” he asked, waiting for the girl to explain herself.

“I just wanted to thank you for letting me join the team,” she stated, assertively.

“Ah. You are welcome. Just know that you’re going to have to work hard,” he reminded her. Coach O’Connor was a strict but understanding man, a coach who expected only hard work and respect in return for his guidance.

Maeve nodded her head and turned to leave.

“You should thank your brother, Wilson,” the coach called out after her. “He’s the one who really convinced me. He really believes in you.”

She thanked him again and walked out of the gym. She smiled thinking about the way in which Patrick stood up for her. She made a mental note to find a way to really thank him. But first, she decided to go to the store to pick up the gear she needed to start practice. She wanted to start as soon as possible, just so she would not let her brother down.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What sport does Maeve want to play?

- A** soccer
- B** hockey
- C** hurling
- D** football

2. Maeve's problem was that she wanted to play hurling, but she did not have a team to play on. How does Patrick attempt to help solve Maeve's problem?

- A** He asks his coach if Maeve can join their hurling practice.
- B** He tells Maeve that she should play soccer instead.
- C** He helps Maeve find a camogie team to play on.
- D** He offers to play hurling with Maeve after school.

3. Hurling can be a dangerous sport to play. What evidence from the story best supports this conclusion?

- A** Hurling is a sport played by men, while camogie is played by women.
- B** Hurling is played with a ball called a sliotar and sticks called hurleys.
- C** Players can score by hitting the ball into the net or over the crossbar.
- D** Players can get aggressive and are required to wear helmets.

4. Why does Patrick ask Coach O'Connor if Maeve can join the team?

- A** because he thinks Maeve can help the team
- B** because he wants to help Maeve play hurling
- C** because he told Maeve he would get her on the team
- D** because Maeve asked him to talk to the coach

5. What is this story mostly about?

- A** Maeve's brother helps her find a way to play hurling.
- B** Maeve is not allowed to play hurling because she is a girl.
- C** Maeve's father doesn't want her to play hurling because she could be hurt.
- D** Maeve envies the boys who play hurling but does nothing.

6. Read the following sentences: "To walk around her neighborhood at four in the afternoon was almost **like walking through a battlefield**: The streets were scattered with various hurling games, with young boys running at each other from all directions."

What does the author mean when he or she says the neighborhood is "**like a battlefield**"?

- A the neighborhood is full of soldiers
- B the kids in the neighborhood play war
- C the neighborhood is crazy and hectic
- D the neighborhood is divided into two sides

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

Maeve wants to play hurling, _____ she plays soccer instead.

- A so
- B like
- C after
- D but

8. Why does Coach O'Connor say that Maeve should thank her brother?

9. Why does Maeve think she cannot play hurling?

10. Explain how Maeve's feelings about playing hurling change throughout the story, and why. Support your answer using details from the passage.
