

- I 1992 marked the first year that the U.S. Olympic basketball team could have professional players from the NBA. Before that the teams from the U.S. had college players. In 1992 the team had Michael Jordon, Magic Johnson and Larry Bird. They called them the "Dream Team." They outscored their opponents by an average of 44 points per game in route to Olympic Gold. Even before NBA stars were allowed to represent Team U.S.A. in the Olympics the United States had dominated the sport. Since 1950 when basketball was introduced as an Olympic sport Team U.S.A. lost only two games in all those years, until the year 2004.
  - A. In 2004 the games were in Athens, Greece. Another American "Dream Team" showed up with a cast of great NBA stars including LeBron James, Carmelo Anthony and the beloved Allen Iverson. They were gifted with great talent as good as any year. That team came home limping from Athens. They did not just lose once. They lost three times to Puerto Rico, Lithuania (who knew) and Argentina. The loss to Puerto Rica wasn't even close, 19 points. That started their slide into Olympic obscurity. They had it all,

talent, tradition and pride, and they lost. Some commentators then and now say they deserved to lose and basically for one reason. They failed; they refused to play as a team. It seems the players, all either current at that time or future NBA all-stars, got caught up in their own hype, and in their own individual stats and how they would look on the highlight reels. In the process, as their individualism overshadowed their sense of teamwork, they were soundly beaten by far less talented teams, whose only advantage was that they were willing to believe anything was possible if they played the game unselfishly and as a team.

- B. Clearly, it was a sobering setback for United States Olympic Basketball. It was also a lesson for all of us who cannot dunk a basketball and will never play on an Olympic team. As important as individual talent may be, a group of no-names who will sacrifice personal glory for group success, who are willing for individual names to be forgotten to history for the sake of a common goal can accomplish far more than a group of superior talented superstars competing for their own personal piece of history. As is often said in the world of sports, "There is no I in the word TEAM." Not meaning to be partial but Ronald Reagan

had on his oval office desk this saying. “There is no limit to how far a person may go, or what good they might accomplish, if they do not mind who gets the credit.”

- C. Our Gospel today sounds like it was taken from the same playbook. James and John are brothers and have a fishing business. They were among the original disciples to become apostles. Along with Peter, they were in the inner circle to Jesus. He selected them for some of the most significant moments in his ministry, that none of the other apostles experienced. Only Peter, James and John were allowed to enter the house of Jairus and witness the raising from the dead of a twelve-year old girl. It was the same three that were with Jesus at his Transfiguration. Finally, it was the same three who Jesus invited a few steps closer to be with him in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night before he was crucified. If Jesus ever named a starting team of disciples these three would be on the elite squad. If any of the apostles were destined to a hall of fame dream team of apostles it was certainly Peter, James and John.
- D. Apparently, for James and John, Peter is not mentioned, this special access into the life of Jesus

was not enough. In a calculated attempt to extend their status into eternity and narrow down the big three apostles down to the big two, James and John asked for the honored seats on the right and left of the glorified Lord. It was not their finest moment.

- E. It was not the finest moment for all of the disciples. The others we are told get angry with James and John. They however, could not take the moral high ground. Yes, they may have been upset that James and John had betrayed their common brotherhood, but more than that they may have been upset because James and John beat them to the request before they could make it themselves. You'll remember earlier in Mark's Gospel that the disciples had been arguing among themselves about who was the greatest. (If the boxer Ali had been there he could have settled who was the greatest).
- F. This dream team of disciples seemed headed for certain defeat. Time on earth was running out for Jesus. So, Jesus called a huddle in an urgent time out, to go over the game plan one last time. Like an ESPN microphone dropped into a coach's huddle we get to hear what Jesus tells them and us. "Whoever wishes to be the greatest among you must learn to be a

servant. For I myself did not come to be served but to serve.” That’s it team. That’s the play we run.