

BEYOND THE SPIRITS OF AN IRON HEART

S02 E02 - "Before They Make Me Run"

Ruri gets distracted from Silver Castle's main objective.

Note: The term "Lavender" isn't used for Silver Castle's background players. I substituted 「シルキー達」for it, for ease of reading. The phrase has no direct English counterpart, but it's fundamentally Silky saying "we" while including "Silver" (as in the team) to indicate that he is representing Silver Castle's lavenderers as "we".

The central stadium's cocktail lights made the diamond shine. Magnum Ace on the mound muttering under the dazzling seven colors of light.

"We will fight... with passionate hearts and minds to keep our Iron Leaguers' spirits high!"

The field turned into a soccer field as Bull Armor gave a spirited effort to catch the stiff ball. Bull kicked the soccer ball back and Windy fired a Mach Spin shot. Top Joy jumped and caught the ball, throwing it through the basket. He knocked a dunk into the ground, and Ryuuken, who appeared at the wrong end of the line, ripped the earth apart. Juurouta splitted the rock, and GZ scored a slap shot. Then the mound emerged into the light again, and Magnum swung his right arm with all his might.

"I'll tell you the beat of this burning soul!"

It was a package of brightly colored drinks that flew in front of her with a roar. The gale hot beverage "Hayate"! A new release, fair and square!

Every time the commercial came on the TV, Ruri was reminded of a question directed at her by Georgie in a preseason match.

"Each of them all have their own specialized team, right...?"

To Ruri, the leaguers looked so alive and shining as they demonstrated their own respective specialties. Starting with that commercial, the off-season Iron League world felt like it was truly a silver lining to the main event. The team that was the lowest-ranked team of all time becomes the world champion. There was no way people would not be excited about such a success story. The Silver Castle team had become the darling of the Iron League itself. All of the TV stations planned special programs and invited Silver Castle as a guest, and Ruri accepted every request.

"When you're a World Champion, you can't just turn down all kinds of requests. We're here because of the fans." But the laissez-faire Ricardo and Edmond Ginjo didn't interfere with Ruri, telling her instead to do what she felt she should do.

Some of the programs had quite a bit of variety to them, and Magnum and his team couldn't hide their confusion. Top Joy, who was featured in a collection of unusual plays

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about hands and suicide points, was happy and smiling saying, "don't mind, don't mind!" Bull Armor was forced to take a quick drink of oil, which made him gassy and oiled up the host. Juurouta, who was told to crack a rock like in the commercial, got seriously angry and rushed Magnum and the others out of there to get back to the mountain. They let him, too.

So, there was always something going on with Silver Castle. There was an incident that made it even further complicated—the source of the commotion was still Ruri.

"Hey, guys. Gather 'round!" The order was given, and Magnum and the others gathered around Ruri on the practice field.

"Owner, what is this?" Bull Armor looked at the rather sturdy strap that was handed to him curiously.

"We're three-legged racing," Ruri answered.

They all groaned.

"We've all had to do things we're not used to doing. I've been thinking about it, and I've decided to pick a show to be on."

"So... is that what this is?" They all agreed with Windy's question, and waited for Ruri's reply.

"Yes. It's the entry event for the big team sports day, Silver Castle. You know how to run, don't you?" Silver Castle exchanged confused looks. "No matter what the sport, you play it fair and square. That's Silver Castle." Ruri puffed out her chest.

"I'm not sure if this is the right thing to do..."

After the formation had somehow taken shape, Bull Armor muttered to himself on the practice field seeing how the sun had set. "It's the owner's decision, we'll just have to obey."

GZ seemed to take it as a mission and repeated the practice of starting.

"I'm having a lot of fun, though," said Top Joy, twirling the strap.

"But the three Gold Brothers won't be there," Windy said.

"It's not like this is a real competition..." Juurouta looked like he couldn't stand it much longer.

"One couldn't understand the true intentions of the owner!" It must have been involuntary for everyone to look at Ryuuken with those words. Ryuuken was silent, but there was still something unexplainable in his expression.

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"Sure, it's troubling that we can't get time to practice with the All-Star game coming up..." Even Magnum seemed to feel the doubt.

Then came the day of the big field day.

"Good luck, everyone!" Ruri's cheering was the same as always, unaware of their gloom. After a lottery (name drawing), the pairs were decided. Magnum and Ryuuken, Windy and Pick, Bull and Juurouta, Top Joy and GZ... even the lavenders tied each other's legs.

"As long as we take the field like this, we'll fight like we're not ashamed of our Iron Leaguer spirit!" Magnum's proclamation kept everyone's spirits up.

The race, which was contested in a relay style team competition, proceeded at Silver Castle's pace right from the start. It was great teamwork. However, something unexpected happened in the anchor group of Top Joy and GZ. Because of the height difference, they couldn't get their timing right. They lost the lead they had built up due to their uncoordinated legs and were being passed one by one. Halfway around the track, Top Joy couldn't take it anymore.

"GZ, keep pace with me!"

"Sorry..." GZ was desperate.

"I have long legs, but I'm not going to take my chances with this..." Indeed, all they could see was the backs of the other teams.

"Alright, let's pass them in one fell swoop."

"Let's go, on my mark... and... GO!"

At the moment he called out, GZ's boosters erupted and sent him dash-sliding down the track. Poor Top Joy.

"Oh, no!" Top Joy cried. He had to be dragged to the finish line with one of his legs taken off. GZ was satisfied with his mission.

A short time after the excitement of the first athletic meet was broadcast to the whole world, an unexpected person came to Silver Castle. Who is that...? Segal? And his request was also unexpected. Magnum and Co., in *Hyperman III*?! Even quintessential Ruri had no words.

"Yes. When a space monster attacks the stadium, the audience is in danger and Iron Leaguers and Hyper Man are determined to save the day. They would love to have Silver Castle."

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When Magnum and his friends were told that this time it was a movie, they had no idea what they were going to be made to do, so they didn't make a fuss about it. It was the day before the shooting. Ruri was in the middle of a phone call when Ryuuken stopped by the factory.

"Yes, well the account number is NCC1701A. Best regards."

"Owner..." Ryuuken called out abruptly. Ruri was as startled as a child who had been pranked. "What was that call? Ryuuken asked. He laughed softly. "I was listening."

"It sounds like this was about money, but..." An exhale of shame and resignation escaped Lurie when the secret was exposed. "Actually, you know, I'm saving up my fee for the job I did off season." But right away, he could see the joy of revealing the secret on her face.

"We've become world champions," he said, "and we're going to expand our team to include baseball, basketball, and hockey teams so that we can take advantage of everyone's talents. Isn't that a good idea? I'm choosing a job that doesn't burden my body and..."

That was the reason why Ruri had accepted the request to appear in Variety, but she didn't realize that was the source of her mistake. There was no smile on Ryuuken's face.

"There's something strange about the current owner. I don't know how to describe it, but... it's as if she doesn't see us."

"What's that..."

Ruri's mood was killed by the unexpected reaction.

"We're Iron Leaguers. We want to show our league spirit at the games. But we can't practice and we're all in trouble."

The color of frustration was building on Lurie's face as she continued to be in denial. "Why? So you disagree with what I do?"

"I think we should just keep doing what we're doing—giving our all to football and baseball. What's important is that we show some Iron Leaguer spirit."

Finally, Ruri exploded.

"I know that! That's not why I wanted to make sure everyone's abilities were up to snuff! I'm sorry I didn't tell you to surprise you, but I did it for you all. I wanted to make you all happy."

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Ruri's eyes grew teary at the end of the sentence. This had never happened before. Unable to catch the torrent of emotions, Ryuuken was dismayed. "Owner..." He held out his hand, but Ruri backed away, as if to escape.

"I won't cry, I'm the owner. I'm the owner and that's about it..." But that was the limit. Large tears poured out of both Ruri's eyes. "Ryuuken, you're such an idiot!" She ran off, leaving Ryuuken unsure what to do, so he just stood there, stunned.

The filming scheduled to take place the next day at the central stadium didn't start any time soon. Ryuuken did not appear. Magnum and the others could see the reason. It was an occurrence unique to Ryuuken. Segal had declared that the camera would not roll unless the seven of them were present, and the film crew was angry. It was obvious that the conflict was pointed at Ruri.

Segal controlled it with a slightly raised hand and spoke gently to Ruri. "Apparently you can't film..."

"I'm sorry..." Ruri looked down, not knowing what to do about the gravity of the situation.

"It's okay, it's only a movie." Segal tossed the script to the chair. "Ryuuken wanted to tell you something more important that you had forgotten."

"What...?" Ruri looked up.

"Leaguers have hearts, or so I was once told."

At that moment, something went off inside Ruri. The feeling was driving her to run.

"I've set up a stinkin' play..." Segal laughed to himself as he looked back.

Ryuuken was standing in a park on high ground in the sunset. It was a place where Ruri used to come for walks with him when she was a child. For the first time, he didn't go to the stadium. For the first time in his life, he disobeyed Ruri. If it had been Ryuuken before, it would have been unthinkable. But now, though he felt a faint regret, he was strangely not worried. It was because he was able to have confidence in his actions. Just then, familiar footsteps approached.

"Ryuuken!"

He turned around and saw a gasping Ruri staring. There was a long silence. They waited for each other to speak. Eventually, Ryuuken opened his mouth. "Owner I'm sorry, I refused to film..."

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"No, I'm the one who should be apologizing..." Ruri moved closer and took Ryuuken's hand. "I... I thought, somewhere in the back of my mind. I knew in the back of my mind that you would definitely come..."

"Owner..."

"I realized clearly that I was spoiled... and that it was my fault for forgetting what we've been going through and how everyone else felt. I didn't realize that until you brushed me off."

"About that..."

"Yeah, I'm going to stop doing TV and movies. Silver Castle is going to go for the World Championship again this year! Right?"

"Yes!" Ruri's sincere smile drowned out the stagnation between them. To Ryuuken, it was a magical smile. "They're waiting for you. Let's go home, owner." Ryuuken picked up Ruri and placed her on his shoulder. The town in the evening darkness stretched out below them.

"I'm sorry I called you an asshole," Ruri muttered hesitantly.

Ryuuken didn't answer right away, but looked up at the night sky. Falling stars covered the full sky. "I believed in you. The owner will never hate me..."

Ruri couldn't help but look up at the night sky. The stars seemed to have drifted, but her eyes couldn't tell if they were really rising. Ruri felt as if she was going to be enveloped in a warm light and gently laid her cheek against Ryuuken.

The next day, Fighter Arrow suddenly appeared on the day when Silver Castle began practicing for the upcoming all-star game. "Frontier—no... Magnum Ace. There's something I need to discuss with you in a minute." Arrow said with a serious look on his face.