

A FATHER'S ASSIST

Senior's journey with basketball fosters growth

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"Go left," my dad chimes out over the crisp hollow sound of the basketball colliding with the pavement. With beads of sweat rounding the defined curves that shape my eight-year-old cheeks and my hair clinging intensely to the moisture harbored on my neck, I dribble two steps to my left, cock my wrist, and listen to the sound of the ball sliding smoothly through the soft white laces. I'm learning.

"Pick up your knees a little more when you run," my dad lectured after a long fought game within the confinements of his heated Ford F-150. My 12-year-old ears listen to him intently, absorbing every correction. I'm improving.

"Shoot the ball a little faster," my dad yells over the roar of the crowd. My 16-year-old hands run through my hair in frustration. I need to hit a shot. I'm performing.

"I'm so proud of my little girl," my dad whispers quietly in my ear, hugging my 17-year-old shoulders tightly after my last game as a Lady

Tiger. With tears in my eyes and a heavy heart, I'm saying goodbye.

Since I was four years old, I could hold a basketball. My dad would take me outside to the driveway and let me throw up pathetic shots. I'd gather all the might my four year old toothpick arms could muster and I'd throw the ball up, watch it soar a grand total of 12 inches, and with hands ready and eyes wide, I'd gaze as the ball made its hasty descent. I "practiced" for hours. Until eventually a foot became two feet, two feet became six, and by the time I could play real basketball on a 10-foot goal, my shot was spot on.

The years progressed. Old hole-ridden high tops piled up in my closet and my outdoor Spalding basketball grew a little worn. Little Dribblers gave way to Upward, Upward faded into Boys and Girls Club, and then it hit. I was a 7th grader at Texas Middle School. I could finally wear a school name on my jersey and play for something that mattered.

Basketball was something I shared with my father. Long



rides back from tournaments or games were spent analyzing things I could improve and things I did well. He was a sports fanatic. I grew to be a sports fanatic. We meshed. Not many little girls grew up immersed in SportsCenter or sitting court side at a Baylor Lady Bears Basketball game.

He let me dream. He let me believe I could go as far as I wanted to with my game. The world was my oyster. With kind words and faith in my ability, he fed me encouragement and fostered my confidence. My Dad helped me shape mental disciplines through basketball that have molded me as a

person.

As I traded my basketball shorts in for jeans, my ponytail for a fishtail braid and my KD's for birkenstocks, my love for basketball evolved as well. Basketball used to consume me. In my mind, my intensity toward basketball was a representation of my worth. With age comes maturity, and I realized my strengths and passions for other things. Basketball gave me an intangible bond with my father that I wouldn't trade for all worth in the world. I loved basketball like you love an old stuffed animal. You keep it. You care for it. But you don't need it anymore.