

Wheaton College

For anyone who has ever been passionate about being the best at something, whether it is athletics, music, art, theatre or any number of other endeavors, it is painful to come face to face with someone who is more talented. I have lived this experience in college basketball.

While never a great athlete, I enjoyed a fair amount of success as a high school basketball player, mostly because I am 6'8" tall. During my junior and senior seasons my high school basketball team tallied a record of 44-13 and made it to the regional championship twice. At the end of my senior season I was named First-Team All Conference, as well as named to the All-Area Team. Needless to say, as my senior season came to a close, I was incredibly excited about how my collegiate basketball career might unfold. In addition to receiving offers from several small NCAA Division I universities, I was heavily recruited by a number of NAIA, NCAA Division II and Division III colleges. In the end, I was lured by an athletic scholarship to Westmont College, a small liberal arts college in California. Soon after arriving at school, I realized that, despite the financial blessing of an athletic scholarship, Westmont College was not for me. I craved a more competitive academic environment that would challenge me as both a person and a student.

As I considered which schools would best fulfill both my academic and athletic interests, I turned to Wheaton College, just several miles from where I grew up. Wheaton College, which is known for its rigorous academic program, also has a strong Division III sports program. It was exactly what I was looking for. In addition, Wheaton College's starting center had just suffered a severe knee injury and had decided to quit basketball indefinitely. I made up my mind; I would attend Wheaton College.

When I met with the Wheaton College coaching staff at the end of my freshman year, I was told that I would be the starting center for the Wheaton College basketball team the following season. That summer I took a job in the Wheaton College athletic facility so that I could train everyday after work. Over the course of those summer months, I spent countless hours lifting weights, playing pick-up basketball games, and running on the track. By mid-August, I was in the best physical condition of my life and ready to start the basketball season. Then

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something happened that would greatly affect my life for the next two years. I was busy cleaning one of the treadmills in the gym when I glanced up to see a very familiar person walking into the building. It was Tim, the starting center, who a year earlier had decided to quit basketball because of degenerative cartilage in his knees. Over the summer he had lost twenty pounds, had both knees surgically repaired, and was taking anti-inflammatory pain medication daily. To my chagrin he had decided that he was not ready to give up basketball and wanted to play the following season.

At first I was disappointed. Had all of my hard work been for nothing? The news of Tim's return caused me to enter the season with a great deal of uncertainty. However, as we began our pre-season practices, I was encouraged by how much I had improved over the summer. My hard work had paid off, and I believed I had a good chance of competing with Tim for the starting position. I was wrong. I was never given the opportunity to challenge Tim for the starting center position. From day one I was relegated to the reserve team. I was crushed. Because of Tim's damaged knees, he was unable to practice for more than twenty minutes each day. While I practiced three hours each day, Tim took the floor for the last twenty minutes of each practice for the scrimmage time. It was very difficult to make the huge investment of time every practice only to have a teammate start every game though he never practiced. Yet, Tim's talent was undeniable. During our season opening tournament, Tim averaged twenty points and ten rebounds per game. The rest of the season continued in much the same fashion. While I practiced three hours a day, six days a week, Tim continued to receive the public recognition during the games. By season's end Tim had averaged twenty-one points and eleven rebounds per game and was named First Team Division III All-American. He was the best NCAA Division III center in the entire country! I, on the other hand, had averaged twelve minutes per game and had point and rebound averages that could be counted on one hand.

As the following season began I considered quitting basketball altogether. Was I ready to spend another season practicing three hours each day, only to watch someone else receive all of the glory? In the end, I elected to play, and during the first several weeks of my junior season something very interesting happened. I realized that I enjoyed playing the game of basketball, not because of the rewards associated with starting, or because of the accolades or trophies, but rather because I loved to compete, to prepare, and to work with others in a

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team-oriented environment. I still deeply desired to play more minutes during the games, but now it was less important to me. While I was learning these important life lessons, Tim again received First Team All-American accolades.

Tim graduated this past spring. I will likely be the starting center for the Wheaton College men's basketball team this season. However, the honor of starting for the basketball team is not nearly as important to me as it once was. More than the honor of awards and the glory of personal recognition, I can now appreciate what basketball has taught me about myself. I have learned that I crave competitive environments, even ones where I am not the most gifted or talented. My basketball experience has also taught me to enjoy intense preparation and working with a team toward a common goal, even when there is little personal reward or recognition to be found. I have also learned to remain persistent amid disappointments. I hope to apply these lessons in a career as a litigator in a corporate law firm. The intense preparation required for trial, the need to work as a team toward a common goal, and the ability to perform all of these tasks without seeking personal glory are all lessons that I have learned on the basketball court over the past three seasons. These are lessons that I want to apply to my life and to my eventual career in law.

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