

## A Field Full Of Reality

Athlete, the word often conjures up the image of a person, who is extraordinarily muscular, with next to no body fat. It can also be a person that possesses unbelievable agility, stamina and strength, able to move the heaviest boulders, even leap the tallest buildings. I am not that person, not that type of athlete. In fact my career as one is not what most consider successful. I have always enjoyed participating in athletics. My ability may not have always been equal to my enthusiasm for playing the particular sport, but one thing is for sure I always have tried my hardest.

My first desired sport was football. I was constantly trying to push myself even further being the smallest of the team. I studied our playbook several times to the point that after each break from a huddle I was re-directing first year players where to go and what to do. On offensive plays where I played the running back position I would break through the seams provided by my offensive linesmen, but no matter how good I looked running the ball in for that touchdown or how many yards I gained for that first down, I didn't think that the amount of yards that I ran for was ever enough. I would run the wide receiver patterns, nevertheless most of the time my outstretched hands would not always end up with the ball in them. It always seemed that no matter how high I jumped to catch some of those

passes they seemed to be traveling into outer-space. About the only thing I figured that I could do the best was run. I was short and small, so naturally I was fast. I would run to and from positions on the field, frustrated trying to find my niche amongst the team. There were times that I stood on the sideline, encouraging my teammates on the playing field trying to impress my coaches with my enthusiasm, if not my ability and love for football.

The summer of 1999, the season was about to begin. I had moved up into the intermediate division and players were much bigger and stronger. I knew that it would take a lot of hard work and determination to land a first team offensive spot in the intermediate division. It had come day for my second practice, August 10, 1999. I took the hand-off, as I spun to my left to break a tackle, I didn't feel my feet leave the ground, and my body turned. I fell and felt a sharp pain run through my left ankle. The pain slowly decreased, and as I got up I could hardly walk, but I shook the injury off and took my position behind the quarter back again. We ran the same play, this time my ankle just gave way, and I fell to the floor, and screamed in pain. I was slowly walked off the field and over to the sidelines by the team medics. As I sat there in anguish they opened my cleats. I began to move my ankle slightly so the team medics assumed that it wasn't broken. That night when I got home as I soaked my body in rubbing alcohol, and put ice on my ankle I wondered about the rest of the season, would I be able to play in the first

half of the season, or did my entire season end in that one practice play. I could hardly put pressure on my foot that night. The morning after, I looked down my bed to see my foot swollen, in the emergency room, the doctor's x-rayed and wrapped my foot, handed me crutches, and about the only thing I remember was the doctor saying: "you will be out 2 to 3 weeks, put no pressure on it, you have a severe strain". I wanted to scream, but my thoughts were elsewhere.

However, I continued to persevere and preserve my skills. About the only thing I could do was keep my faith, knowing that I worked so hard to improve for this season, and someday, somehow I would be able to show that I had improved. At last came the week of what felt like eternity that I was able play on my feet again, and I was so happy that I could play again. I was more than determined to prove to my coaches that I had improved my skills, and that I had persevered despite the minor set back of my ankle injury. My first game back I played special teams, it was a punt return, I ran it 75-yards for a touchdown. Although I didn't run much in that game, my weeks of preparation and anxiety showed in my playing. All too soon it was the final game of the season. We were playing for the Pop-Warner Football Championship and we all were determined to win. Unfortunately, my team was having a rough time controlling the anxiety of our hopes to win the championship, there was about a minute left in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter. We gathered

around each other for the huddle; the play was called, back to the line of scrimmage. As we lined up for the last play, I remembered one thing that my coach had taught me, and that was to “always look into your opponent’s eyes, and never let him know where your pattern is to be run”. The snap was called I ran the pattern, the ball was thrown deep, I dived for the catch and somehow I ended up in the end zone. About all I remembered was looking up and seeing the referee’s hands go up, and my whole team was jumping about on the sidelines, touchdown. We Had Won.

I realized then that it wasn’t my skill, but so much my spirit that helped my team earn that championship and also alleviate me to gain the respect of my coaches. I would like to go on to describe how after this incident I went on to become a star player for my team, but my age didn’t allow me to stay within that division. This experience has given me much more than I had anticipated; it has given me the confidence, strength, and motivation to persevere despite setbacks. It has shown me an “inner strength”, a spirit born out of love for what I am doing, a spirit that doesn’t let doubt and self pity stand in the way of achieving goals, and a spirit that fuels my desire to achieve. Truly for me athletics has been a success, if not in the traditional sense, but in a more personal and direct way that has helped me to grow as a well rounded individual.

Word Count: 1,131