

We lived in a nice neighborhood but my family wasn't nearly as well off as the other families. We always had food and the basic necessities, but occasionally the water, electricity or phone would be disconnected. Most of our neighbors had nice clothes and shoes, and all the latest toys or gadgets. I usually wore hand me downs from my brothers, and at times would have to wear my shoes until there was a hole on the bottom sole. The hole would sometimes be so big that it would wear a hole in my socks.

Once, when I was around 8 years old, my shoes couldn't take it anymore. Before I could go outside to play with my friends I had to wait for my dad to come home from work with a new pair. I waited and waited and my dad finally made it home with the new pair of shoes. I was so happy because I could finally go outside and play. I took the shoes out of the box, took the paper out of the shoes, laced them up, gave my dad a big hug and ran out of the house like Carl Lewis out of the blocks! By the end of the night I had played hide and go seek and many other games. It was getting late so I had to return home. I looked down at my feet and I couldn't believe my eyes. "How am I going to tell my dad this one?" I thought to myself. "My brand new shoes are destroyed". Yes, the new shoes that I waited for all day were no longer so brand new. They were ripped and had holes in them from just one night of playing. When I returned home and showed my dad the shoes, he didn't seem to be surprised at their condition. The next day my dad bought me another pair of shoes, but this time the shoes cost more than \$5.00 and were more durable.

It was in this tiny neighborhood where I first got the love for the sport of basketball. Around 1984, during election time, a politician on a quest to get votes decided to donate money to our neighborhood to fund the materials needed to build a basketball court. The court was to be built at the end of the neighborhood in a place that was overgrown with brush and bushes. He purchased the concrete for the floor, the paint, two backboards, two basketball rims, and two

basketball nets. After all of the materials were provided, it was up to the neighborhood to get together to build the court. It took us two weekends to complete it. Everyone pitched in and was a part of the process. I was so excited to finally have unlimited access to a real basketball court.

Before the court was built my brothers and I had to get very creative when we wanted to play basketball. We would find an old bicycle wheel and remove the tires from the wheel and the spokes from the rim. Then we would hammer it to the roof in the backyard. It wasn't an ideal basketball court, especially since we had to play on the grass, but it was better than nothing!

But now none of that mattered because we had a real court to play on. Well, the first few weeks after the court was completed I wasn't so happy anymore. The older kids would never let me play because they felt that I was too young and too little to play with them. My oldest brother, Alford, was the ring leader who blocked me from playing. He and his older friends played at the best times of the day, when the weather was perfect for a basketball game. I was always there, begging them to let me play. They would refuse to the point that they made me cry. I had no choice but to wait for the times when they were off the court to play. It was usually during the early mornings or when it was too dark to see. I was happy that I at least could find some opportunities to play, but what I really wanted was to play with the big guys. Yeah, they were bigger and stronger than me, but I had so much confidence in myself that I was looking past that.