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**Impact of a Dunk**

At first, the doctors thought my wrist was broken, then strained, or maybe sprained, so I was in and out of casts for two months, with no progress. I questioned their intelligence as, day after day, I left the hospital with no results to show from it. In the meantime, I found myself replaced and forgotten as the team traveled to San Diego for tournaments without me. I had lost my spot and my future as a basketball player looked bleak. Eventually, the doctors finally diagnosed my injury as a dislocation and I was put in a cast for eight weeks.

Growing up, I have always had a love for basketball. I looked up to the greats like Kobe Bryant, Tracy McGrady, and Allen Iverson, to name a few. They inspired me to pursue basketball at a young age and I found myself playing any chance I had. I would always study old tapes of Michael Jordan and Magic Johnson to gain a few techniques to use when I played. I loved how Michael Jordan always did a type of fade-away\(^1\) that seemed to me like the hardest shot, but he made it look effortless. Sometimes, I would switch it up and watch Magic Johnson cross over defenders and do no-look passes as if he was Michael Jackson displaying his moonwalk. Jordan and Johnson made it look like a work of art when they played, and I was determined to be just like them. I practiced all day and all night to improve my skills. I learned how to do a fade-away by the age of 11, and by the age of 13, I was on several basketball teams. I used to play center for a lot of my teams because I was the tallest, but that didn’t deter me from patenting\(^2\) my game after Michael Jordan and Kobe Bryant. My favorite team was the Lakers and I used to love going to Staples Center to see my favorite players play under the bright lights. I used to tell myself, “One day that will be me playing under those bright lights, getting cheered on by thousands of fans.” I was a child at the time; I still had a dream and I was pursuing it against all odds. Basketball was more than a hobby; it was life.

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\(^1\) A fade-away or fall-away in basketball is a jump shot taken while jumping backwards, away from the basket. The goal is to create space between the shooter and the defender, making the shot much harder to block.

\(^2\) Basketball slang for “imitating.”
Impact of a Dunk

As my game continued to progress, I found myself playing harder competitions, with added intensity. I started playing for my high school, averaging about fifteen points and eight rebounds a game: solid numbers. Yet I wasn’t satisfied. I began intensifying my workouts and playing more than ever to increase my productivity on the court. Although it was mandatory for all basketball players to follow the rules, especially, “Don’t play pickup games,” I found myself engaged in games at parks near my house. My reason was to get better through the added time spent away from mandatory practices and games and to find out what kind of player I was. That seemed like a smart idea at the time, but later I would realize that perhaps the rules were created to protect players like me.

One day, I was playing at the park and I found myself on a fast break with no one near me and only one player in front of me. I guess my ego got in the way as I envisioned myself “pulling a Lebron” and dunking over my friend, Garren, who was all set up for me. I increased my speed and took off in sight of the ten-foot rim that stood between me and two points. While in the air, I felt someone swipe at the ball and all I could see was the ground as my body lost balance mid-air. I put my arm out to try to absorb some of the impact of the fall, but all I heard was a crackle and I was out. I opened my eyes and felt a sharp pain. I looked down and saw the downward shift of my hand and felt excruciating pain. I was carried off the court and rushed to the hospital.

During my long recovery, I often found myself in the hospital waiting room, where I tried to occupy the free time I had by reading magazines. One day, I came across an ESPN magazine article about a famous basketball player, Shaun Livingston, who had suffered a horrific injury on the basketball court. I continued to read the article and found out that his leg had literally turned sideways and he had to be carried off the court. He had to quit basketball indefinitely. I picked up another magazine describing another basketball player, Brandon Roy, who had suffered multiple injuries to his knee but continued to play through. I discovered that Roy later suffered a massive injury and had to retire from the NBA at the age of 27. Although these stories were sad, I couldn’t help but love the players for their passion. I felt a connection with these athletes because they too had to give up what they loved because of injuries. I could envision the disappointment in their eyes and their heavy hearts as they sat in the doctor’s office, waiting for the bad news. I reached to grab for more magazines but then heard a dim voice calling my name, “Femi Ige, the doctor is ready to see you now.”

3 Pulling a Lebron: To dunk over someone with extreme power.
When I arrived home, I looked up the latest books and magazines specializing in sports. I began researching my own injury and even diagnosed myself a month before the doctors did. I had a real connection with the texts and felt as if I was still a part of the game, even though I wasn’t playing. These books made me realize that playing basketball wasn’t everything and reading opened up a world of infinite opportunities. I stopped feeling sorry for myself and started pursuing other books that weren’t just about sports. Although it may seem hard to let go of something you love, pursuing something different may be beneficial as well. Reading helped me when I was struggling with what life was dishing out to me. I realized that I wasn’t the only one who had to give up something he loved because of an injury. Sometimes you have to accept what you are given and try to make the most of it.