

# A Father Remembers

I knew you were destined for greatness the first time I held you,  
Rubbed you with all of my heart and whispered;  
“I don’t know what you’ll grow up to be, but whatever you do always strive to be the best.”  
Your competitive fire was fueled at an early age in whiffle ball, garage hoops, games of catch.  
Subtle words of encouragement, big brown eyes watching your mentor’s moves,  
Memorizing every step, every flair, waiting for your time to shine.  
Rides with dad alone, always listening to the lessons, silently assuming the  
Torch of excellence, worn nobly by those who preceded you.

In a drafty junior college gym, a little fourth grade boy in an oversized green and gold jersey  
With the number fourteen barely visible above his ill fitting shorts  
Steps to the foul line down two with no time left:  
Blocking it all out, establishing the resistance to pressure that would become your song.  
Leading them on, making them believe...  
“Imagine being the kind of player that people would come from miles around just to see you play.”  
Years later, a tiny freshman steps out in the state quarterfinals with no fear as  
Thousands get a slight glimpse of what was going to come.  
On a long, silent bus ride home, you felt your teammates pain and  
Promised yourself, they’d never feel it again.

Practicing alone, the flame of challenge grows, its heat overpowers you as  
All of the lessons begin to come together, making sense now as you realize it’s more than just a game.  
Endless hours of practice, summers away, the ball becomes an extension of your hand.  
The sounds of a snapping net lull you to sleep each night as  
You count the days until your destiny can be fulfilled.  
The morning birds of summer end their awakening tune and  
Finally, after all the years of listening and preparing...it’s your turn.  
You make your mark instantly, 25 times in fact,  
Recognition comes with individual honors earned..but something’s missing.

And then, a year later, the endless outdoor courts, tiny grade school gymnasiums, recreation centers and  
High school gyms give way to the Oakland Coliseum where the greatest ply their trade.  
Beneath the glare of the brightest of lights another “great one” emerges as  
A loyal army of brothers band together to touch the stars.  
I remember your tired, sweat soaked, sagging body, still quiet and confident,  
Arms triumphantly raised, finally content in securing your place in history.  
The madness of your forefathers becomes your passion too  
As you get better and better, learning the little things,  
Living the big things: Discipline, Love, Sacrifice and Leadership.

One last summer of preparation awaited you like an old friend but  
Too swiftly the leaves turned to brown and drifted slowly to the ground  
As you realized that the hastening passage of time had now become your enemy.  
You are beckoned to the Coliseum for one last song,  
Playing it as sweetly as you had in the past, then  
On to Arco Arena for a final shot to dance with the gods one last time.  
But this time, an exhausted, thoroughly used up  
Braveheart from another era departed with one last kiss and embrace.  
Standing proudly, interviewed at the most painful moment  
Courageously assuming the burden, apologizing to your friends  
For not being able to do it one last time, voice cracking, knowing, it’s over....for now.

Despite the disappointment, the slight twinkle in tearing eyes  
Provides a subtle glimpse that more lessons have been learned.  
The little baby that felt a soothing rubdown and heard strange words from a new world,  
Who gingerly approached each step in his legendary journey;  
This proud young man will move on, silently setting  
His sights on the next challenge, growing each step of the way.

I will always remember the flickering frames of film in my mind,  
Always embracing every precise move, each miracle finish.  
But most of all, I’ll remember how you dreamed,  
How you worked, and how you loved.