

Beyond the courts and fields where athletics meets artistry, I redefine what it is to be a ‘Student-Athlete.’ In my nature, the canvas is the gym and the arena and the brush is my equipment. I am not simply a student who plays a sport; I am a student artist, where every creation is a victory, and every stroke is a winning move.

Basketball is a highly team-oriented sport that mirrors art’s expressive nature in many aspects. Like an artist wielding their brush against a paper, we players weave a tapestry of dribbles, passes, and shots. Each move we make is almost like a brushstroke in a dynamic painting, with personal style and improvisation akin to a dancer finding their rhythm to the music. The flow, mistakes, and outcomes of the game, each contribute to a captivating narrative, much like the storytelling power of art in various forms.

“3-point line, back. Half-court, back. Free-throw line, back. End-line, back. Line up in the base-line”.

A series of sighs and indecipherable brief eye-contacts followed in the gym. Coach just announced probably one of the worst nightmares for an athlete: the suicide drill.

My shoes had a damn good traction with the sound they made screeching against the delicately polished floor with every change of direction I made. The noxious smells of sweat mixed with sweet perfume hung heavy in the atmosphere. But as a freshman on the varsity basketball team, I found myself caught in the unavoidable trap of laziness, with my legs barely moving with reluctance that displayed the exhaustion within me.

My coach’s voice traveled from the other side of the gym; her husky voice that almost reminded me of a man’s bounced off the walls “Move faster, push harder, you guys are ridiculous! Be a better athlete!”.

Her words at first glance don’t seem to have much meaning behind them; however, she was the center of my development as a student-artist.

My journey as a basketball player started with trepidation and hesitation. I was a shy freshman, a lazy freshman who did not dare to take risks. Stepping onto the court was my worst fear. I relied more on the safety of the bench and the skills of my seniors than my own. The spotlight effect,

the feeling that all eyes were on me, intensified with every step I took in the rectangular square, making every move of mine feel like a scrutinized performance.

Where I saw hesitation, Coach Williams saw potential and capability. Despite my reservations, she endlessly threw me onto the court more often than she did to the bench. It was a sink-or-swim situation; At first, I barely floated.

“Beautiful, ladies. Beautiful play, MK”, said coach, every layup and shots I attempted through all my doubt.

Her words were strokes of encouragement and added eloquent colors to my canvas. A canvas initially filled with nothing but the ugly hue of self-doubt began displaying a form of unyielding commitment.

“Get your head in the game!”, is what Coach Williams used to yell during time-outs.

This phrase transcended the boundaries of the basketball court; it wasn't simply regarding making shots and dribbling with intelligence and confidence. Regardless of whether on or off the court, those words echoed in my mind, a reminder to stay focused on everything I pursue.

This sport became a form of art, an untouched plain sheet of paper waiting for any artist to contribute their unique strokes onto one synergetic artwork. Every pass, every shot, and even every mistake were the layers of the piece we all created. This sport made me an artist, an artist who welcomes circumstance to have a touch in their art.

Seasons changed and so did my life; I moved to a much smaller school with limited funding for athletics. Coach, who had molded me into a player with potential, was now absent. It left a void that seemed perpetual. The new setting lacked the quality of my former gym, and my motivation as an athlete dwindled, and so as an artist. At some point, my piece showed no signs of development. Some strokes I had painted through the past seasons seemed to lose their luster and slowly faded.

I contemplated my place and identity in this unfamiliar environment. I questioned whether I could recapture the essence of the player I used to be. In times of doubt and losing myself, I repeated in my head uncountable times, “Beautiful play, MK”. Coach Williams' words reiterate the meaning of being an athlete. It provided me with a sense of longing but a strange sense of relief simultaneously.

The words of Coach Williams will accompany me anywhere and have guided me through hardship that seems impossible to overthrow.

I picked my brush up once again, and gently smeared paint on the tip of it. I placed in on the fading paint and radically drew a solid stroke through the middle of the incomplete painting.

At the end of the day, the essence of basketball extends far beyond just my performance; it incorporates vibrant strokes of experience, growth, and the enduring relationships with teammates, coaches, and opponents that are forged along the way. Each dribble I let myself take and every swish of the net, is what contributed to my artwork of memory and personal evolution. The sweat I shed through the coach's yelling and the laughter I shared regardless of losses, are all nuanced brushstrokes that assembled my narrative as a student artist of depth and richness.

Coach Williams, a pivotal figure in my journey, is now more than a mentor on the court but a guide on the larger lens of life.

To understand the beauty of my art is defined through my journey as an athlete, as for a while it seemed like nothing but a mess at first. It lay in the diversity of players, the mentorship of Coach Williams, and shared moments of triumph and downfalls. However, I have not finished my painting; there are still many spaces for me to further fill. I have yet much to unfold in my ongoing journey as an athlete and an artist, and I'm with open arms for those who would add more color to my canvas.