

HOW DID I GO FROM THE BENCH TO PLAYING PROFESSIONAL BASKETBALL?

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Chapter 1 High School

Well let's see I've been playing basketball my whole life. Mainly I played street ball around the neighborhood. My parents and one of my friends; Jason Ferrygood and his little brother; Bucket Head parents purchased us basketball goals from Wal-Mart. I think that might've been the best investment our moms ever made. We didn't have a court so we created one. His court consisted of grass, and we thought if we played on the grass long enough eventually the grass would die. That's exactly what happened. The grass died and we had a court. The dirt made it easier to dribble on the grass. My court consisted of my driveway. My parents built this big house with a huge driveway and a two car garage. In between the garage was a layer of bricks; that's where I put my goal. We used the end of the concrete as sidelines and the cracks of the concrete were the free throw line and 3 point line. We played ball everyday, but neither of us joined a team. Nobody respected us because we always stayed to ourselves and weren't very popular. Beside that; we were always known as good baseball players even at a young age. So as time went on we decided to join the local basketball biddy team. This was our 1st year playing and it was a success. We both made the All-Star team and participated in summer travels. That summer was very good for me because I got to see talent from all around Louisiana. I quickly realized I wasn't as good as I thought.

Fast forward 3 years and I'm in middle school. I've always played football and baseball, but never basketball. It had become interesting to me because when I was home I played all day; rain, sleet, or snow. So the season came around and it's time for basketball tryouts. In middle school we had an A team and a B team. I didn't make either even though the guys that did make the team didn't do anything spectacular. I was just the quiet kid that no one took serious. The only thing was I took myself serious, and I was furious. I would take my emotions out in my backyard everyday playing on my court. I imitated superstars, pretended I was in big games, and I even made up my own crowd chants. I was doing all this because I couldn't do it in a real game. As time went on that year the coach eventually let me dress out, but I barely played.

Next year I'm in high school in the 8th grade and I made the A team but, it was one of those "might as well situations where they didn't have anyone else to put on the team." I played very limited minutes. If I averaged 7mpg that was a lot. That year stressed me out because there were kids that were younger than me getting more opportunities than me. I knew I could play I just needed an opportunity. This was a tough year for me because I felt like I was done; I was just not going to play basketball. I thought to myself; I would stick to football and baseball and try to make it in one of these sports. School never interested me, I always knew I would be playing a professional sport.

Next year I'm a freshman in high school. So I tryout for the junior varsity team in high school. I did very well in the tryouts and outperformed many of the players there. In my brain I just knew I was on the team; no brainer. I went home excited told all my friends how well I did and that they can get ready to start attending some games. Time passed and the season came and I realized I hadn't attended any practices and it was time for the first game of season. The varsity team was packing to hit the road. I saw my coach; Mr. Madere and asked him; when were they going to let us know whether or not we made the team? He responded "Oh you didn't know you were on the team, too late now." That was his way of letting me down easy. I was crushed, it was one of the worst days of my life. So that season I had to hear all of my friends having a blast playing. All I could do is pretend in my backyard.

Sophomore season came and voila! I was on the team, but I was buried on the bench. Then one game Daniel had a terrible night and coach put me in and I saw red! In my brain I told myself I would give him no reason to sub me. I played so good; I ended being the starting center for the remainder of the season. I dominated JV and I didn't know what I was doing. I was so thirsty to play that all I did was ran as fast as I could and jumped as high as I could. I gained a lot of respect from my teammates, community, and my coaches.

Junior season was here and I was the starting center on the varsity squad. It was the whole team's first time playing varsity so everyone had low expectations for us. I came into the

season in great shape. I had learned how to actually train a little bit. Normally I would just play as much as possible then just give 110% during the game. We were murdering everyone that we played that season and I was the leader. The guy that always got cut was now the leader on the varsity team. We played in a tournament at St. James High and we went against Helen Cox. I met my match, there was this 15 year old kid that was 6'10 and ranked #1 in the nation. He dunked on me in the first play of the game. Turned out his name was Greg Monroe. After playing him I stole his mentality and dominated players on my level. We made it to the championship that season and lost by 1. It was a great season for all of us because we had no expectations; we just played and had fun.

Senior year was here and I was prepared. I put baseball and football on the back burner and focused solely on basketball. I joined an AAU team over the summer and got some recognition. I had a couple of scouts contacting me so I prepared like my life depended on it. I dominated the whole season. The game had slowed down and everything was so easy for me. I was mobile with a good jump shot and great athleticism. We fell short that season to a very talented team that went on to win the championship. The memories from that season are unforgettable. My high school career was very interesting. I went from being a nobody to being the big man on campus.

CHAPTER 2 COLLEGE

So I just graduated from high school. The kid that couldn't get on the team earned a full scholarship to the University of Louisiana. I signed to play in Lafayette for one reason the CAJUN DOME! I visited the school and wasn't interested in anything, but the DOME. Coach took me and my family to eat to this place like subway called OLD TIME. I didn't do anything special with guys on the team, I didn't stay overnight, all I did was see the campus and the DOME. I was sold before I got there. I had committed to Nicholls State University only because I didn't have another offer. When UL came calling I had to take the opportunity. What I didn't know was that I was the 8th freshman signed that year and the other 7 were pretty well known in the state of Louisiana.

Practices started and immediately I could tell I was way out of my league. These guys were 6'7 running like guards. Where I'm from if you were 6'2 you were a big man. The speed of the game was way too fast for me. I couldn't dribble, I still could shoot a little but I had no strength. These guys were way stronger than me. Their skill level was on another level from me. I didn't even know what a triple threat was. After my first college practice I sat in my car pondering if I would go back to my dorm room or take I-10 and go back to Vacherie, La. After I finished throwing up I decided to go back to the dorm room.

Freshman year started and after getting my dorm and classes situated it was straight basketball. I quickly noticed that I would be playing limited minutes. These guys had been on the scene for a while and I could tell coach favored them a little more. My confidence was shot but I worked my butt off like I was the starter. Then for some strange reason our captain; David Dees did a radio interview and the host asked him which freshman did he think had the most upside? He responded "Tyren Johnson". My mouth dropped. Here I am thinking no one even realized I'm in practice half of the time and the leader of the team said I had the brightest future. My confidence was at an all time high. Ever since then I took practice personal because I didn't want Dees to have to eat his words. I didn't play that much that season but you could see some flashes. That season I averaged 8.7mpg, 1.6ppg, and 1.6rbg.

Sophomore year arrived and it was pretty much the same. I received a few more minutes but mainly because some guys got in trouble, injured, and some were not as good as advertised. This gave me confidence because at least I knew I could compete in college basketball no matter the stats. I played hard and always brought a lot of energy to the court. It was still hard for me to adjust to going from playing center my whole life to playing the 2 and the 3. I made up for my lack of skill with hustle and will. That season I averaged 18.7mpg, 3.1ppg, and 3.4rbg. That was an improvement but still terrible.

Junior year came and this is where it gets interesting. I started playing a little bit more. My body was starting to fill out with muscles. I was smarter and more motivated. This year I was getting a little bit of freedom to make mistakes. I capitalized on that by becoming accepted a little bit more by my teammates. I just played as hard as I could and was known as the glue guy of the team. Being a pro wasn't even a thought. I didn't think I had a shot at the NBA and I didn't even know what going to play internationally meant. I just was playing hard to represent my school. That season I averaged 23.9 mpg, 7.1ppg, and 5rbg.

Senior year came and wow; I was prepared! I knew what I wanted to do. I wanted to be a pro. I set goals at the beginning of the season; Sun Belt Player of The Year, Louisiana College Basketball Player of The Year, and All-American. The season came and I was a man possessed. I prepared all summer for this season. My focus was on another level. I made many sacrifices in

my college life. I didn't have any friends, didn't hang out, and I didn't waste time. Every hour was accounted for and my day was based around basketball 24/7. I started after some motivation from my assistant coach Jai Steadman. He told me after my junior year that my career was done. He said "All you guys are done. I have 2 guys coming in from UNLV and they're going to take all of your minutes". I heard that and didn't take it personal. I asked the Coach Lee for the keys to the gym. He gave me his set. I was in there all day, every day. A typical day for me was 6 a.m. skill work, 8 a.m. class, 12 p.m. weights, 4 p.m. practice, 7 p.m. study hall, 9 p.m. extra shots, and 11 p.m. sleep. I was unstoppable, all of those goals I set at the beginning of the season I accomplished them. I came up short on the All-American goal but that was a stretch given the university I attended. I managed to receive Honorable Mention All-American. That season I averaged 36 mpg, 18ppg, 8rpg, 3.3 apg, 2blks, and 2 steals per game; a crazy jump in the stats. That's what you get with hard work and the mindset that you're going to make everyone pay that ever doubted you. That season helped me to ink my first professional contract in Aalst, Belgium. It was crazy a player that has been cut and overlooked his entire life just signed a 6 figure contract in another country to play the game he loves.

Chapter 3 How Did I Do It

It was simple. I had a vision, a dream, and a plan. My vision was that I was going to play professional sports by any means; ever since I was a kid. I just wasn't sure which sport I was going to play. I chose basketball because I played it the least and it was fun to learn. I realized that my instincts were natural but I didn't understand the rhythm of the game. So I started watching NBA games non-stop. I would mimic the players movements, skills, and tactics. I would try them when I played street ball. That gave me confidence. I would play street ball against the older men in the neighborhood; most were drug dealers or into a lifestyle I was far removed from. They were tough and looked at me liked a privileged little punk. I would demolish them, I'm talking dunking on them, shaking them, shooting jumpers in their face, and I would even talk trash. So when I got back to high school those kids couldn't tell me anything. I realize that respect equaled confidence to me; so I started seeking it everywhere I went. I would play anybody in any hood. When I got to college Giraud Park was the place to be. There were a lot of ex-UL players and good players that would've killed to be in my shoes so they played extra hard against me. I gained my respect pretty fast there because they liked my demeanor. They could tell that I had played in some rough places because whatever they tried they could not get me out of my zone. So what I'm telling you is one way to make it to the pros is confidence; get respect from your peers, community, and coaches and that will equate to confidence. No matter what anyone tells you, you will remember those days you fought for respect. That's why over time it seemed like I was failing in the sport I always bounced back. According to society standards I was failing but behind close doors I was working my butt off knowing that if I get one opportunity that's all I needed.

Another way I did it was that I dreamt a lot. Till this day I still daydream a lot. I actually think that daydreaming is a talent. My teammates laugh at me all the time and think that I'm crazy. They don't understand that I'm probably visualizing a way to dunk on them in about 5 minutes. Since I was young I always had this image in my head of me playing for the Knicks. Ironically when I was doing pre-draft workouts the Knicks told me I was high on their board. Sometimes I feel like my dreams always come through. I think it puts me in a state of mind that anything I dream can be manifested one day. You should be imagining yourself being great. I would play in my yard for hours against MJ, T-Mac, Kobe, and LeBron. Sometimes I would actually put myself into those guys' bodies and recreate situations they were in their previous nights' games. My imagination was huge, I never thought average. One of my main mottos is "Control what you can control". You can control effort. Effort, time and a big dream is a hard force to stop.

The way I planned my days and workouts were probably the most important things I did to make it to the pros. I had schedules, I had motivation quotes on the wall and I had meal plans. I would learn how pros go about their day to day; from workouts to nutrition. When I changed the way I worked and the way I ate everything changed for me. I would make 300 shots per day. Notice I said "make". Those shots were made while going game speed. I would put myself in situations I would be in during the game. By time the game started it was nothing I hadn't done already. I wouldn't eat fast food restaurants everyday. I learned how to do a little cooking and started some healthier meals in my diet. I was a chicken lover, so I would eat a lot of chicken and pasta or rice. I wasn't so big on red meat but anything was better than Mcdonalds. I started eating more veggies and fruits. I never ate vegetables until I got in college. It made a major change in my day to day. My energy levels were way up and my workouts were more efficient. Another key point is that I would workout by myself a lot. That means I was in the gym a lot by myself; to simulate pressure I would challenge myself in shooting drills. I would make 10 in a row before I could move to the next spot, make 5 all net, make all bank shots, and all kinds of other little drills that challenged me to be laser focused with some pressure. There you have it; that's

how I became a pro after sitting on the bench for most of my career. I visualized, dreamed and planned for this life and I wouldn't trade it for anything because I appreciate the journey. The NBA was my dream but that didn't workout so I have to take advantage of whatever opportunity the universe provides me. Thanks for reading and remember "EVERY DAY MAKEMPAY".

