

The Last Spot on the Team

The first time I went to try out for the basketball team, I was cut after the second day. I told my friends I did not really care, and that I only tried out because I wanted to have fun. But that was not true. I had practiced every weekend and memorized drills from YouTube. I would also stay after gym class so that I could shoot the ball in an empty gym. I wanted it way more than I knew how to say.

After tryouts, I stopped playing altogether. Every time I picked up a basketball, I remembered the list on the gym door with my name missing. It felt easier to pretend I had never really wanted it.

A few months later, I walked past the court one afternoon and saw a group of kids from the younger grade playing a game. One of them asked if I wanted to join. Without thinking, I said yes. I stayed for an hour. Then the next day. Then the next. Slowly, I started practicing again. Not for a team. Not for anyone. Just because it felt good to play.

When tryouts came around the next year, I almost did not go. I had not played in front of coaches in a year, and part of me was still scared to hear “no” again. But something felt different this time. I was not trying to prove anything. I just wanted to see how far I had come.

The first day went better than expected. I moved quicker, made sharper passes, and called out plays instead of staying quiet. On the second day, the coach pulled me aside. He said, “You are not the strongest player here. But I can tell you not to give up.” I made the team. Barely. I was the last name on the list. But this time, it was there.

That spot was not about talent. It was about showing up anyway. It was about coming back after hearing no. It was about playing even when no one was watching.

Since then, that mindset has followed me into everything else: schoolwork, group projects, and interviews. I no longer measure success by how easy something comes to me. I pay more attention to how I show up when things feel hard.

Creating the team felt good. But I am most proud of learning how to keep trying when I had every reason to stop. That is the version of myself I want to keep building. The one who stays.