

Bang! “Oh my god,” the little kid said to me. He said, “I wish I could be as good as you,” and I remembered back to when I was his age, just six years old, and I was nothing. I couldn’t touch backboard back then, either. I remember a guy on the court said to me, “You will never make it. You will keep doing this over and over, but you will not make it to the NBA. You will never be able to dunk.”

At that time, I thought to myself, “What if he is right? What if everything he says is true?” I wanted to be something, not someone who tries so hard but still doesn’t go anywhere. I wanted people to support me, to say to themselves, “Wow, I believed in him, I knew he could do it.”

As soon as I got home, I asked my dad, “Can we work out some day? I know you know a lot about working out, and I want you to be the person to push me, Dad.”

The next day my dad came up to me and said, “You wanna be what you want to be?” When I nodded, my dad said, “Well, get up then. You’re not going to get any better by sitting there.” My dad made me work out every single day during the summer. He made me do three sets of pushups, sit ups, chin ups, toe ups, and squats. Most days, I thought I was too sore to keep going but every time I slacked off, my dad said, “No pain, no gain. Keep going, son, prove them wrong. If you give up now, you will be the loser. Remember, they’re testing you, and they want you to give up!”

I kept going, I didn’t want my dad to look at me and see a quitter. Over and over, in my head, I said, “I will achieve my goal. I will not give up. Everyone who doubts me will watch me prove them wrong!” Every day and every night I practiced the same exercises, trying to get in excellent shape so I could do what I had always wanted to do on the court.

My dad took me into the open gym and said, “Touch the backboard. Now.” I jumped as high as I could and I just nipped the backboard by luck. My dad nodded and told me, “This is a good start, but now we gotta do more workouts, and don’t give up, Austin. We are going to need more heart.”

My dad told me to grab a ball, so I picked one up from the floor. Then, he said “This time, jump and hit the backboard with the ball, and keep on doing it. After a while, you will increase your hops and

be a step closer to do what you've always wanted to do." I started, and in no time, the back of my calves were burning, but as I kept at it. It hurt more and more--more than I could have imagined. When I looked over at my dad, he immediately yelled, "Don't give up, keep going! Go!"

I couldn't say anything, but in my head, I thought, "But I'm getting lower and lower here--how am I ever going to increase my ability to hop?" I started to wonder if I would ever get to the point that I could dunk a basketball. When my dad said, "If you take a hit, you get up and keep fighting. So, keep fighting for what you want!" I knew he was right, I knew I couldn't give up. I had to keep fighting!

Then, the first time my dad took me to the gym and I saw how muscular the guys were, I was very scared. The first thing my dad said was, "Don't give up, keep trying."

I looked around again and said, "I won't, Dad. Never."

After two long months of hard work, my dad said it again. "Try to touch the rim." I surprised myself by getting really close and said, "This is going to be easier than I thought."

My dad answered, "We've worked harder than this--try like you want it!" Then, I jumped as high as I could and that time, I touched the rim.

I started to smile but then I said quickly, "I don't know if I can hang on it."

My dad said, "Try, I think you can." So I tried--I pushed and stretched--and I did it! My dad smiled his biggest smile and told me, "Hard work pays off."

This wasn't just any dunk. It was something I had always wanted to do. For my entire life, I had wanted to be like Kobe Bryant, touching the rim at such a young age, and suddenly, here I was. I was going to be that person that everyone wanted to watch on the court. Now I am looking forward, hoping I'll be known and be one of the greatest, too. I'm ready to show this world what I've got. I'm ready to be a better player, a better person, than that guy who I was watching when I was six years old.

I understand that no matter what you want to do, you have to be willing to work hard for it. Nothing is ever going to be handed to you. Hard work really can beat talent.