

Big Dreams, Big Leagues

Life Experience

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Reflecting on a life well lived is part of the aging process, and my whole life has revolved around sports. As an 11-year-old, my lifelong athletic journey started with reading library books about Walter Johnson, Ty Cobb, and Christy Matthewson, and I so wanted to be a baseball player. My precious nickels and dimes were spent on trading cards while acquiring a dislike for gum. Television led me to idolizing the likes of Sandy Koufax, Ernie Banks, and Willie Mays. I pitched really well in the neighborhood games and excitedly signed up for Little League like the other kids. My dream of being a major league baseball player ended right there, as girls were not allowed to play.

Perhaps a switch to football playing quarterback or wide receiver would lead me to glory, but the Roman Gabriel magazine pictures came off my wall. My NFL dreams were shattered; girls were also excluded from the Pop Warner League.

I found my next passion in basketball at age fifteen, my bedroom walls adorned with Pete Maravich, Oscar Robertson, and Lew Alcindor posters. I drove my non-sports fan parents crazy by constantly bouncing the ball, throwing imaginary passes to the wall, receiving the bounce back, and then dribbling all fancy around imaginary opponents to score easy imaginary layups. Opportunities

to shoot real baskets were limited to open gym times twice a week. As a girl, I was never asked to play in pickup games, so I cut my hair short, always wore a warmup jacket, and finally got in—as a boy! It was rough with the older boys and men, but I could pass and shoot fairly well. I was thrilled to be playing real basketball until the day I was chosen to play on the skins side of a shirts/skins game. The game instantly changed for me, as suddenly *the girl* was asked to play only as a last resort. Now you may be thinking, good grief, when does this end?

Jump ahead to my senior year in high school. My extracurricular sports activities included running track, playing tennis, and surfing. However, my passion was still basketball, and I frequented open gym to shoot baskets. Then serendipity stepped in. I met a coach for a military team, the Hickam Hawks, who asked if I wanted to play for them in a women's city league. Oh yes! In my enthusiasm, I forgot I had no transportation and was at the mercy of the city bus system; I missed my bus once and learned to hitchhike. The season didn't last long as a fight broke out in our third game, and I took a punch in the jaw. Game cancelled, league cancelled; however, the coach for the opposing team became the first head coach under Title IX for the University of Hawaii women's basketball program, and she remembered me. Under scholarship, I became the starting point guard at 5'3" and leading scorer for the first four games until I broke my ankle.

While recuperating in a rubber-heeled cast, I took up golf. Within six months I shot 75. Soon, I experienced the thrill of winning local ladies invitational golf tournaments. The first fall basketball practice came around, and the golf coach and basketball coach called me off the court to tell me I was off the basketball team and would be playing golf from now on. I could not do both. I got an extra year of eligibility to play golf, and my senior year I finished 8th in nationals with the likes of Nancy Lopez and Patty Sheehan in the field. I met them again in the big leagues (the LPGA) less than six years after taking up the sport and played on tour for 22 years. During that time I played many Pro-Am golf rounds with two of my idolized pinups of the past, Roman Gabriel and Ernie Banks, and many other professional athletes who never made it up on the bedroom walls of my youth.

Settling in Moore County after a fulfilling professional golf career has been a blessing with so many new life lessons learned through education, work, and volunteerism. A new sport has seized my passion as I push age 70. Pickleball is my game now, and although I'm not as agile or strong as before, the determination to improve burns in me. Aches and pains aside, I'm still living the life of big dreams just as I did in my youth. And these days, a lot of the guys want me as their pickleball partner. I have come full circle in a roundabout way.