

## **Quitting is Sometimes Winning!!!**

by Deloris Johnson ElGammal

I have been watching my children play sports, specifically, basketball for what seems like a lifetime. My daughter started with basketball when she was 11 years old and my son started when he was 11 or 12 years old. It seems perfectly natural to put your children in sports. It is a good way to keep them in shape, off the streets and in the case of my children, they were bullied and it served as a source of confidence.

During our daughter's formidable years at the Waldorf Schools where there was one class per grade, girls did not have playdates with her due to her size and the boys loved for her to be one of the guys in sports activities. This seems like a minor childhood obstacle to overcome with time and age. This was not the case with my daughter; the mean girls were constant at the Waldorf. She began to walk hunched over in an attempt to fit. Transferring to public school seemingly changed things a little. There were opportunities socially for her to fit in, and one of them was her playing basketball on the basketball team. Once she started playing basketball, we noticed the change in posture and the change in how she was viewing herself. Her confidence was building. She was even approached by the High School Varsity Head Coach to play on the high school team, while in middle school. Things seemed to be falling into place with her developing a love for herself.

All this seemed amazing, then we started dealing with coaches, both on the school team and AAU team. What seemed bright, became disheartening, to say the least. You convince yourself that these sorts of challenges are a good stage for what may be faced in life. These challenges are a good way to learn how to tough it out and not quit, how to build your character and how to develop good discipline habits.

We quickly learned through observation and conversation that playing a sport was a good way to get into college, continue your passion at a higher level, possibly be considered for the pros and the most important, get an education. All this depends on whether or not the coaches showcase you as a player or not at the high school level and AAU circuits. Though my husband was a professional athlete overseas and for the USA National Handball team, neither of us really understood how athletes were recruited to play at the NCAA level in the United States. The politics and cutthroat behavior of the parents, players and more shockingly the coaches, due to ego, money, politics, are disturbing, yet situations faced in life. Yet, you stick with it to reach the goal of going to college. Years of sacrifice, working out when your friends are having fun, not really having a major social life, because you are burning the candlestick from both sides with your school work and basketball. There is not much wriggle room for a player to develop themselves on an individual level, explore and learn outside of the sport. This is a major sacrifice. Besides our child's sacrifice, thousands of miles and dollars later, the sacrifices pay off. She earned herself the opportunity to play at one of the most prestigious universities in this country and in the world and garnished herself a pretty decent profile, despite the obstacles.

As a parent, there is a sigh of relief to see your child has made it and she has left all the "nonsense" behind her. This is the prevalent thought you have at this point because after all the college coaches have sold you the rainbow and the pot of gold during the recruitment process. They have made promises that your child will be treated well and that they are joining an amazing program that will help to grow into better young women while pursuing their education and playing the sport they love. Hell as a parent, you wish you could come to play the sport with your child. My daughter could not wait to commit to the coach. I will never forget the official visit and we were sitting down at dinner. I was receiving rapid-fire texts from my daughter, Mommy I want to commit now. I am sending

rapid-fire back to her, calm down and let's talk later back at the hotel. The main thing I remember was her excitement and the twinkle in her eye that she would be playing for a coach she "respected" and at a school that is amazing. All of that excitement and enthusiasm went to hell once she stepped foot on campus. The honeymoon was completely over. The coaches kept changing the schedules and showed no concern for the player's academic schedules, the player's weight and physique were constantly called into question and connected to the player's actual performance, and the instant favoritism and rules applied selectively. The coaches would encourage you to speak to the coaches, but once you spoke with the coaches it was discouraged; speaking up instantly lessened you in the coach's eyes. Confusing and hypocritical needless to say. It's her first year and it's the common thought in our family it takes some getting used to the different procedures; give it some time. To add fuel to the fire, the Coach showed racial insensitivity towards girls of color. For example, for team pictures the coach would require the girls to wear their hair down long and straight. How's that possible if your hair is bushy, curly or kinky? or Just not straight? Second-year rolls in and things go further downhill. We begin to hear hints of abuse and see signs of abuse.

To wake up to go to practice and pick up a ball became a burden. My daughter expressed a sense of being lost because she was being mentally and physically deteriorated on the team. She was being pushed further down the totem pole, particularly whenever she spoke up or voiced her concerns. This resulted in her value being diminished as an important member of the team. So instead of being empowered as a young woman, she was being silenced. The questions soon turned into "why was I recruited by" and "what am I doing here?" The next question is "Why am I killing myself to keep up with a team and a coach with no positive return?" Soon the enthusiasm to play the sport so turned in delusion and disdain. Where's the benefit, in the long run, to be on a team does not value her presence at all. What is the benefit of being on a team where the coach doesn't allow you to even practice during practice? "What am I gaining from this?" Our questions, "How was my daughter improving herself as a young woman?", "How was she becoming a stronger individual?" The answer was, she wasn't. This program was chipping away at her slowly. The ultimate aim for her was not to be recruited to the WNBA to make \$40K a year max? The ultimate goal was to enjoy playing basketball and to pursue her career goals. You can't build your life around basketball. Not everyone is going to become a sports commentator or want to be a college coach. Finally, your basketball career if you choose to pursue it, is in the hands of a coach that can make or break your career as a player. It is all subjective.

You have to sit back and evaluate what are the most important things in life. Your sanity, your well-being, am I gaining anything from this activity, is going to continue to improve my life or hinder it, am I happy or miserable? These are some of the questions you have to ask yourself. It requires you to reevaluate what you are doing. My daughter reevaluated what she was doing and was being on this team still worth it. The hardest part was doing this sport define her as a human being, would it mean she was a failure because she quit. Most would say, oh this is college athletics. It's one thing for college athletics to be tough and challenging, but when it crosses the line to abusive behavior by the coach there's a problem. Quitting is considered giving up, being weak; it's such a nasty forbidden word. WRONG!!! It is not a statement of your abilities; it is a statement that it is time to move on from something that is detrimental in your life. It's getting a divorce from something due to irreconcilable differences. It is ok to quit!!!! IT IS OK TO QUIT!!!! In the final analysis, my daughter came to the conclusion that quitting was the healthy thing to do and has been the better for it. Sports did not define her, her essence actually got lost in pursuing the sport with a coach, who did not value her as a person. Once a sport or anything in your life becomes a parasitic and toxic, it will lead to nothing. You have to reevaluate what you are doing If you have to quit and move on .... By all means, QUIT. Sometimes quitting is winning and staying is losing. My daughter saved herself. She showed the

ultimate bravery by knowing quitting was the best thing to do to save herself from a toxic environment that would have destroyed her. She has been better since quitting. She has been thriving and doing better things with her life.