

MORE THAN JUST A GAME

Thoughts and feelings from Anthony Ozobuekwe



There are a lot of things to say about the game of basketball, different opinions, drives, commitments, but let me take this time to share my thoughts on this game I love.

First, I would like to highlight my first statement - it is more than just a game. It is my love, it is a lifestyle - my lifestyle. You see, everyone does their own thing however they see fit. For some, it is just recreational and fun, but a few of us fall in love, and decide to commit. With this commitment comes; sacrifices, discipline, perseverance, dedication, obsession, the willingness to go the extra mile -to fight, and to compete. See, I like to remind myself that what will get me to my goals are those extra hours I put in, the part no one sees, the discipline to get up at 5am to go train and put in the work, because "hey it's not just a game, it's a lifestyle".

Just the other day I sat down talking to friends about what it takes to live the lifestyle. Going by the expression on their faces, and listening to myself, we all agreed in consensus that it is a lot, and not everyone can do it. Being a basketball player is not just about getting in the gym and working hard. You also need to study and learn the proper way to do things because, although there is a saying, "practice makes perfect", I will have you know that in the game of basketball, it is rather "perfect practice makes perfect". Studying and learning are also primary aspects, as these help you become a more complete player, and also to develop mentally, giving yourself an advantage over most competitions, as that is a major aspect of basketball.

A lot of work needs to be put in because even though most people believe just being tall guarantees you will be a good basketball player, that is false. You need to work on major skill sets, be you tall or short; ball-handling, shooting, rebounding, defence, IQ, passing, footwork, finishing, etc. This is because while you are taking a break, someone else is training and competing for a shot at your position.

So far, I have given insight into the things we as athletes- as basketball players - choose to commit to. Most certainly, discipline and dedication are required to get into this, knowing it is a marathon; all the early mornings, late night trainings, sacrifices of friends, events, relationships, big family moments...all these sacrifices need to be made believing, and reminding yourself that hard work pays off. It is important to have discipline and dedication even while persevering and pushing through the hard times, injuries and losses because people around you will not understand why you are doing it, why you put yourself -mind and body - through it.

Speaking of injuries, you might have heard the saying, "basketball is a non contact sport". Well on paper perhaps, but in reality that is not the case. You will get hit, you will get challenged. It is a battle field and only the strongest survive, you will need to be ready physically, as well as mentally. Get in the gym! Do not be deceived! It is far from that!

Expanding on the mental aspect. You have to be ready to battle on the court, and a lot of the battles are won in our heads. Thus, be ready for all verbal forms of intimidation - the "trash talks". You do not have to be a good trash talker, but you better be good at taking it, and moving past it, because like one of the greatest legends of the game Kobe Bryant said; "you ain't that special, it's not all about you, so get over yourself and keep playing".

Everyone comes to your game in excitement hoping and expecting you to bring your 'A' game, the energy at the arena speaks volumes. They hope you make all the shots. I mean, that is fair, for it is in fact your job. They pay to watch this, and there really should be no excuses for you to deliver on their expectations. However this result can only be produced after the hours of repetition, the blood, sweat and tears put in, the hours of practice not seen. There is indeed a lot more to this love of mine than what people see and expect. Staying ready for that big moment, putting up that big shot in crunch time, being ready when that coach calls on you.

I give a lot to this sport that I love. It is a lifestyle for me that I have to live by, "it's not just a game".

I was once told by an uncle of mine - a professional in his sport - who describes sports in itself as a calling, that is, it is not for everyone. Therefore, like every relationship, you have to push past the love. You will get really pushed, and you will get checked, and that is when your WHY comes in.

This round orange object, I decided to dedicate and commit my life to. As you have been wondering whether to commit or not, I have just shared with you my insight into one of my greatest loves - Basketball .