

The Breakaway

By: Mr. Morton

As far as Justin knew, there was only one way out of his neighborhood: basketball. So he ran with the ball like the hounds were chasing him. He could drop any of the older guys at the court in a blaze of crossovers, fadeaways, and finger rolls, and the younger guys didn't stand a chance. Justin saw his way out and he ran for it. But the world has a funny way of changing right when you think you've got things figured out, and that's just what happened to Justin.

One day when Justin was shooting around at the local court, some guys from another block ran up and asked to play. The big one in the middle said that he had heard that Justin was the best and he wanted to see if it was true. Justin said, "Nah, Man, I'm just shooting around with my cousin, I ain't trying to get all sweaty right now." But the big guy was insistent, and Justin's cousin was bugging, "C'mon, Justin, drop this guy." So Justin just figured that he'd just do what everyone wanted and play.

Justin was running all over the big guy and making his shots while he did it. But just as the outcome of the game seemed certain, the big guy shoved Justin as he went for a lay up. Justin went flying in just such a way that he managed to tear up his right knee. The doctor said Justin might never play again, and if he did play, he wouldn't play the same. Justin was devastated.

The first six weeks, Justin just laid in bed with his leg in a long cast feeling like a broomstick. He watched three reruns of *The Simpsons* every day and ate potato chips until the bag was empty, and then he'd dig the salt and grease out of the corner with his index finger. Justin blew up like a balloon as watched his once bright future fadeway. Right when he reached the bottom of the pit of despair, Justin's sister, Kiki came home from the university

She came in the house like a whirl of sunshine, bringing exciting tales of a far away land called college. Justin was amazed and intrigued by the dorm room dramas and campus craziness that Kiki told, but he could hardly believe any of it. It was as if she were telling him about some fantasy land high above the clouds. Justin gazed off dreamily as she spoke.

"Justin!" She interrupted his day dream. "Let me see your progress report." Justin was ashamed. His grades had really slumped since his injury. "Oh no, this won't do, J," she said. "We're going to have to get these up." Well, Justin was a pretty stubborn guy, but his older sister had a way of getting him to do things that nobody else could. So while she was home on break, they studied together, and they talked, and they worked, and Justin felt better than he ever had before.

After spending those weeks with his sister, Justin realized that he didn't want to feel bad for himself any more, and he didn't want to quit. Basketball used to be his thing, and he was good at it, but now there was only school, so he had to get good at that. Justin passed through all his classes like a half-court trap. By the time he got to senior year in high school, his GPA was hovering in the slam-dunk position. The last thing that Justin had to do to get into the college of his choice was score well on the ACT. Well wouldn't you know it? Using the study skills Justin had acquired from his sister, Justin scored a 24 on the ACT. That's not the highest score a person can get, but it was high enough for Justin. Now he had his academic game together.

Though the recruiters never came to Justin's door, every university that he applied to accepted him; and when the Fall came, Justin had his choice in colleges. Though he'd miss his family, Justin decided to enroll in the sunniest university in Hawaii, and nobody could say that Justin made a bad choice.