

The Journey

By: Charlie Cates, CPT, PES

www.selfmadefitness.com

charlie@selfmadefitness.com

I struggled for a while to come up with an article for this month's newsletter. I had many ideas, but none of them fit what I was looking for, and I was always brought back to the same thought, so I finally decided to go with the idea that I kept coming back to. Take what you can from this article. This is more therapeutic for me, but hopefully you will be able to get something out of it as well. I will be back to giving advice after this issue, but for now I need to clear my head.

The destination is the motivation, but the journey is why I breathe. These are words that I have spoken and written many times, words that I try to live by, but on March 20, 2010 these words seemed like nothing but lies. Staring at myself in the mirror of our locker room in the Salem Civic Center, I wanted nothing more than to hear my phone alarm go off and realize that the events that had just taken place had only been a dream. Unfortunately, that had already happened once that morning, so a second time was very unlikely. Plus, my wrist was still killing me from dunking in warm-ups, and I didn't think the subconscious could feel physical pain. So that's where I was, nauseous over what had happened, pissed off beyond all belief that we let one of the greatest opportunities of our young lives slip away, and dumbfounded as to how I could have ever believed that the journey was what I was truly living for.

That moment had been on my mind, on all of our minds, since we began training in the spring of the previous year; that moment when we would stand up on the podium surrounded by family and friends and we would look out into the crowd and know that we could not be touched. That's actually not fair. For most of us, if not all of us, that moment had been on our minds since the ball was first placed in our hands. However, it wasn't until 21 years or so later that we would actually be presented with the notion of making that dream a reality. So I'm sure you can understand the frustration that was felt when everything we had worked tirelessly for for the past 22 years disappeared over the course of 9 minutes.

Many people told us after that game that being able to make it that far was quite an accomplishment and that there are very few teams who are ever able to do that, but that didn't make sense to me. Why should we gauge the success of our season on how other teams around the country did this year or in past years? Shouldn't the success of our season be based off of our own ability and potential? And why couldn't I get over the feeling that, even though the season was filled with incredible memories and accomplishments, there was something left unfinished? It wasn't until two weeks after the final buzzer had sounded that I was finally able to remove myself far enough from the situation to realize what the true joy in the season was.

Forgive me now if I begin to belittle the wins and losses of the year for other events that took place behind closed doors, because while the wins allowed the journey to continue, it was what happened when nobody from the outside was watching that made the season one to remember. It was the Saturday mornings

when ETS and I would run Self Made Mountain, pushing ourselves to exhaustion while the rest of the campus slept. It was the day during fall pickup when we ran suicides as a team for 20 minutes after playing for two hours because Blake was pissed that Troy and I couldn't make free throws (I love you for that by the way), because Blake knew, probably better than any of us, what this season would amount to if we did the right things. It was the plate pushes with James during winter Reading Period, when everybody else was in the library studying, but James was doing pushes until his quads gave out and he lay on the floor screaming as he began to cramp, then picked himself up and finished out the set. It was seeing that same kid develop himself from a freshman at the end of the bench to a sophomore starter and All-American. It was walking into the gym an hour before practice and seeing guys already putting themselves through drills. It was the feeling of 19 brothers all pulling in the same direction with everything they had, embodying the spirit of "Get Big or Die Tryin'", defending their home court each and every time they took the floor, and, ultimately, transforming into men.

While there were many public moments that made this season memorable (the wins, the crowds and support, the dunks and plays), it was the few moments listed above, and the many other moments I chose not to list, that remind me why I believe the things I do and why I live my life the way I do. And it is because of those moments that I can rest easy now because it is those moments that allow me to breathe after the journey has completed.

Get big or die tryin'.

Charlie Cates
Self Made, Owner

Charlie Cates is the owner and head performance coach of Self Made (www.selfmadefitness.com), and is a Certified Personal Trainer and Performance Enhancement Specialist through NASM. He has worked with athletes of all ages and ability levels, from 9-year-old kids to NFL MVP's. He can be reached via e-mail at charlie@selfmadefitness.com.

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