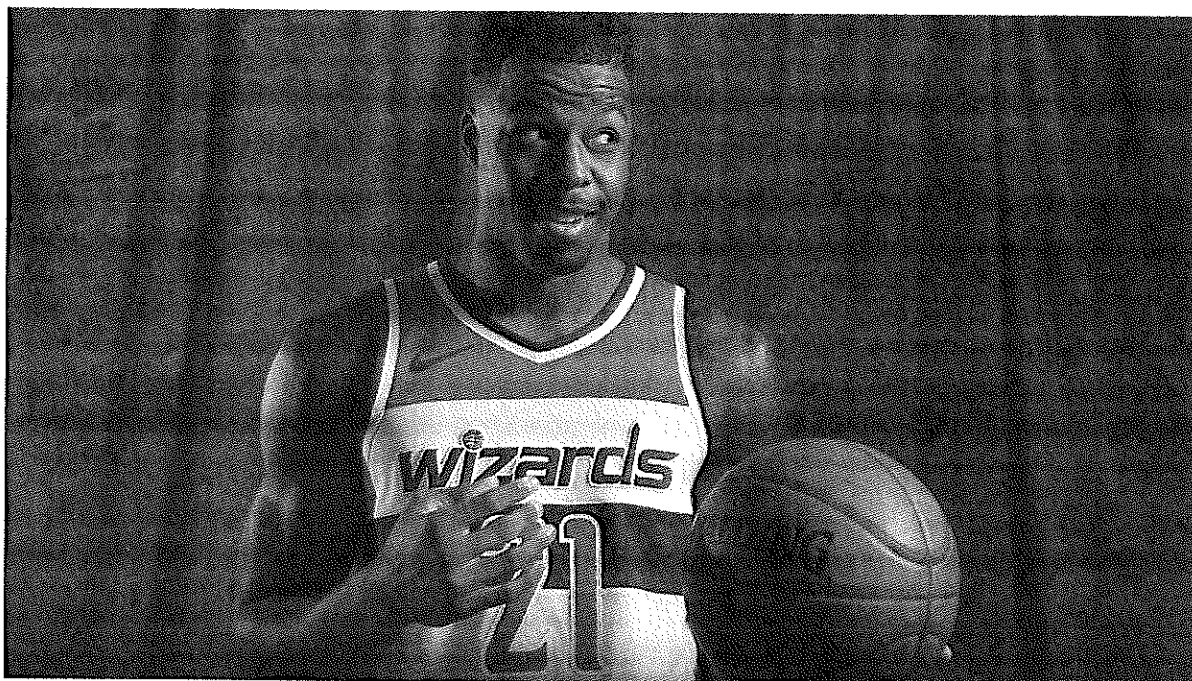


He had to go through a lot of hoops to make it to the NBA

By Washington Post, adapted by Newsela staff on 10.19.17

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Before Carrick Felix survived the Wizards' roster cuts, he had to work through challenge after challenge. Photo by: Katherine Frey of the Washington Post.

As a motivational speaker, Carrick Felix begins his speeches by sharing stories from his life. There were teachers who said he'd never graduate high school and bullies who picked on him for his size. Some nights he slept in his car while he was a student-athlete at Arizona State University.

One night while playing for the Santa Cruz (California) Warriors, a minor league team that is part of the National Basketball Association (NBA) Golden State Warriors in Northern California, he almost lost basketball for good. Felix took off for a dunk and landed awkwardly, snapping his left kneecap in two.

The injury led him on a tour of self-discovery, and now, Felix can once again call himself an NBA player.

On Sunday, Felix beat the odds. He made the Washington Wizards' (District of Columbia) regular 17-man team, completing an unlikely two-year comeback from his fractured left kneecap.

Scott Brooks, the coach of the Wizards, has nothing but positive things to say about Felix. "He's earned this spot," Brooks said. "He wasn't given it."

He Worked Hard On His Game

After most Wizards' practices, the 27-year-old Felix is the last player on the court. Even the boring routine of free-throw shooting sparks the megawatt smile on his face. It wasn't always this way though. Felix once hated basketball.

Growing up, Felix was small. He was 5-foot-5. He loved skateboarding and would much rather jump over a box than practice his jump shooting.

"He was short for a long time; I didn't think he was going to grow," said his mom, Beverly Felix, who from her sideline perch could hear the joking from the stands. "Parents even commented how short he was."

The adults were nice compared to the kids at school. Besides being small, Felix looked different from most Arizona kids who liked skateboarding. He said he was "bullied." It also didn't help that Felix was diagnosed with attention-deficit disorder and stood out for attending special education classes. Beverly vividly remembers hearing the advice from counselors to medicate her son and learning secondhand how teachers tried to steer him away from college.

"What they said he couldn't do, he did," Beverly said. "With Carrick, we wouldn't let him fail no matter what."

Being A Dad Poses Quite A Challenge

Before his sophomore year, Felix sprouted in height, and his passion for basketball developed. After junior college, Felix earned a scholarship to play at Arizona State and during his fourth season, his life changed. Felix was going to be a father to a little girl.

"Do I leave (school) or stay to take care of her?" Felix asked himself.

Felix became stressed and took the difficult path. He continued to play basketball but gave every dime of the money he received as a student-athlete to support the mother of his child. Broke and virtually homeless, Felix spent parts of the season couch-surfing and living out of his car.

His unsettled life showed on the court. One night after a game, Dedrique Taylor, an assistant coach, stopped Felix for an important meeting in the parking lot. Felix sprawled out on his car in tears, finally talking about the weight on his shoulders.

"He was probably ashamed and embarrassed and didn't know who to turn to," said Taylor, now the head coach for the Cal State Fullerton men's basketball team. "He thought things were over and heading in the wrong direction. It was a bump in the road but it didn't need to define his future."

In his final year of eligibility, Felix made the Pac-12 all-defensive team. He was named the conference's scholar-athlete of the year while earning his master's degree. Behind this work ethic, Felix was selected as a 2013 second-round draft pick of the Cleveland (Ohio) Cavaliers.

Felix jumped around the minor league before landing in Santa Cruz where he injured his knee.

"I was told I would never be able to play the game of basketball again," Felix said.

Adapting To New Circumstances

After the shock wore off, Felix began the long road of rehabilitation. Along the path, he evolved outside of basketball. With his daughter, Zayah, as his inspiration, Felix and a buddy developed a phone app ZNGIT that pre-books outdoor recreation experiences for travelers. Felix toured several schools and shared his inspirational journey.

"No matter what your dreams are, you can make them come true," Felix said. "I've been called stupid. My teachers said I would never graduate; I was in special ed."

"I've lived different types of lifestyles and been through God knows what. To be able to go through that and be able to teach it to others and help people overcome adversity and get to their goals, it just means a lot to me."

Quiz

- 1 Read the section "He Worked Hard On His Game."
Select the paragraph from the article that suggests that Felix enjoys talking about basketball these days.
- 2 Which sentence in the section "Being A Dad Poses Quite A Challenge" supports the inference that Felix may not have talked to many people about what he was going through?
 - (A) Before his sophomore year, Felix sprouted in height, and his passion for basketball developed.
 - (B) "Do I leave (school) or stay to take care of her?" Felix asked himself.
 - (C) He continued to play basketball but gave every dime of the money he received as a student-athlete to support the mother of his child.
 - (D) "He was probably ashamed and embarrassed and didn't know who to turn to," said Taylor, now the head coach for the Cal State Fullerton men's basketball team.
- 3 Which sentence from the article would be MOST important to include in a summary of the article?
 - (A) Besides being small, Felix looked different from most Arizona kids who liked skateboarding.
 - (B) Felix sprawled out on his car in tears, finally talking about the weight on his shoulders.
 - (C) "No matter what your dreams are, you can make them come true," Felix said.
 - (D) I've lived different types of lifestyles and been through God knows what.
- 4 Which statement is a MAIN idea of the article?
 - (A) Felix was at times bullied by other kids for skateboarding.
 - (B) Life was not always easy for Felix when he was growing up.
 - (C) Felix did not know if he should continue school or drop out for his daughter.
 - (D) Felix once broke down in tears while talking to one of his basketball coaches.