

Love Is Rage

Looking up at what felt like a sea of defenders getting ready to attack my belt of flags, gave me nothing but butterflies in my stomach. To see the determination in their eyes could only be compared to a rodeo clown looking a deranged bull in its eyes as it prepared to charge. But, in my case, there were six bulls, their ages ranging from five to seven years old, and they wore the opposing team's jersey.

Because I stood only about four feet and four inches, my dad thought it was best for the team for me to be a runningback. As I stood behind the best quarterback in the Pearland Flag Football League, I looked over at my dad.

There he was standing on the sideline with a whistle around his neck and a white board in his hand. He made a gesture with his hands for me to take a deep breath, slowly exhale, and to shake it all out. Nothing else could've made me relax more than seeing my dad doing the wiggle on the sideline of my first football game of my career, and having my family behind me there with me every step.

But as I click through the pictures of that day now, I see that my mother looks absolutely ecstatic for her sons on the field, even though she doesn't know that she won't communicate with one in the future. My dad looks at her proudly, thinking my brother and I could be their big break in life, not knowing legal documents will split them apart, before either of us can sign a contract to a professional team. Then, there are no more pictures. I often think there was more I could've done to keep our family perfect, but I cannot think of more than one instance in which we were one:

My mother is yelling her sons' names into her bedazzled megaphone and waving her pom-poms in the air.

My sister is performing the coordinated cheer she practiced in the previous week.

My dad, with a smile brighter than his bald head, is looking out at us running past him.

And my big brother is celebrating with me on the field.

Growing up in Sunnyside, Texas, and South Houston, Texas, there wasn't a plethora of career options we could choose from. Constantly, my dad taught me and my brother Kerry the ins and outs of the game of football, hoping for us to go further than he was able to. My brother was leaner and taller for his age, seven, with big hands that made catching the ball much easier for him. It was not the same situation for me. My shorter stature and fear of the "pigskin" hitting me in the face made me the perfect candidate to be a running back, who simply handed the ball. My natural speed was unheard of compared to the majority of boys at that age, which gave me a huge advantage in my later years. Kerry would always make fun of me and my "butterfingers," which I couldn't necessarily change at the time. But it was simply another small obstacle for me to overcome and make me stronger.

When we finally were old enough to register for the closest flag football league, the anticipation started to rise. Our mom would not let us sign up for tackle football, like our friends were doing, because as she said, "You can trip and fall and get trampled and get sent to the hospital for a concussion and die". It was nothing we hadn't heard from our overly protective mother before. The solution: My dad would drive 25-30 minutes just for his sons to go to their

first showcase, where the coaches of every team could scout out the players and decide who they wanted on their team. Of course, with my dad being one of those coaches, he chose me and my brother for his team, along with the others who filled the rest of the roster, and, notably, the best quarterback in the league.

With only a few weeks to prepare, the team would come over to our house and practice in our backyard, while the parents did whatever parents do when their children are out playing. Our team was the Pearland Jaguars, and we were facing the Pearland Jets for our opening game and my very first game as a football player. My jersey was a size too big, my cleats were a half size too small, and I was wearing my sister's calf warmers for extra length because, according to my mother, I could've "been freezing and caught a cold and froze to death in the hospital".

Regardless of the wardrobe malfunctions and the freezing-to-death threats, I was extremely excited to actually play something I was growing to love.

Until I saw the defenders that stood in my way.

The first play shook all the worries and negative thoughts from up out of me. After that, it was literally a breeze. Particularly, that's what the Jets' defense felt when I ran right past them. I scored an easy four touchdowns, making a name for myself as one of the best newcomers in the league, alongside my brother who had a couple receiving touchdowns, as well. After five years dominating in the Pearland Flag Football League, I was inducted in their version of a hall of fame when I got old enough to play for my middle school, becoming one of the founding members. That first game and familiar support gave me the confidence I needed to make football the career path I was willing to embark on.

But, it slowly and steadily fell apart throughout the coming years.

Now as a collegiate football player, I look back at the photos taken at that game. I cannot fully remember every single detail, but there is enough to paint a good enough picture of the beautiful event. I still randomly have dreams of me running around on the warm turf, scoring touchdowns, making my parents proud. My mom still has my jersey, also. Only now it's about five or six sizes too small for me. She's kept most of the belongings from me and my siblings' childhood, seeing that we're all grown up and have flown out the nest.

As a cornerback now, I miss having the ball in my hands. After seventh grade, I was converted to quarterback up until my junior year, because of my leadership skills and my skinny build. Having complete control of the outcome of the game was the greatest responsibility that I was willing to undertake, but also the biggest weight put on my shoulders, for I was usually the one to blame when things didn't turn up how the coaches liked. That heartwarming and sensational feeling was a mere metaphor for the guaranteed support and perfection of my family that a young boy needs in his coming up years.

As a wide receiver from my junior year in high school to my first year in college, I regretted changing positions from running back more and more. The feeling of having the ball in my hands relied on the offensive line blocking for the quarterback just long enough for him to throw the ball in my vicinity, making it possible for me to catch the ball, and hopefully score. The complexity of the chain of events required for me to obtain the ball made me grow farther from that original love for an offensive position, similar to how I've grown to rely less on the love of my closest relatives and family members.

But, on this level of competition, the position where I play isn't solely up to me, which is one factor upon why I play cornerback this year. I have a lesser chance of touching the ball, but that ultimately makes getting interceptions or picking up fumbles a lot more exciting. Having the opportunity to take the football from the opposing team, makes my new position more exciting than I could've ever imagined.

I will always have love for my family, but I've simply grown more self-centered in a way that I cannot worry about them for every second of the day. Now, I give my love and attention to those that are closest to me. I have a handful of friends that I call my "niggas" that I do anything and everything I can for. But my best friend, Davion, has been my closest friend since my sophomore year. I am extremely grateful for him and his family in which I can never repay them for the many things they have done for me. I consider him my blood brother, and I will take a life for him. And vice versa.

I still get the same jitters and excitement every time I step on the field for a game like I did when I was two feet shorter. But only pictures saved on my USB, and memories of the day, can give evidence of the day I played my first game. With my family now separated, both legally and geographically, we don't often get together and talk about what happened in the past.

Every memory of our family can be found either in a Dropbox folder, or in a white tattered cardboard box, next to the water heater in the house we grew up in. And, knowing my family, that'll all be forgotten in a few years.

Author's Note

I chose this essay because I feel I put this most effort and emotions behind it. It wasn't easy to put what has all happened to me and my family, but it was a burden lifted off my shoulders to have it off my conscious.

My second article, when I interviewed Camelia Henry, helped me revise this essay, because I saw some things I needed to fix when I typed hers out. I also was able to relate to her family, seeing that our family timeline is opposites in a way. Her family was separated in the past, but now is together, whereas mine was together and is now separated. The process of putting her story on paper made me feel relieved I was not the only one with those feelings.

In my third essay, I made new friendships in the employees for the restaurant I interviewed, and I learned new techniques I can use in everyday conversation, or if I want to pursue a communication type career. --Kory Hubbard, Summer 2018