

DRIBBLING IN THE BASEMENT

By James Collins

When my son James was in high school, he was a dedicated scholar and wanted to be a successful athlete. He applied for the cross-country team and the track team and eventually became captain of both. He then applied for junior varsity basketball and was doing an admirable job. However, two of the people on his team were outstanding athletes and became all-state athletes during their careers. Jim decided he had to raise the level of his skills.

My first indication of his new goal came in an unusual way. Our house was a garrison effectively a two-story house raised over a basement foundation and a two-car garage. The garage took up most of the footprint and the remaining area was roughly twenty by twenty feet. The main beam ran the length of the house supported at intervals by steel columns, which ran from the concrete floor to the bottom of the main beam.

I was upstairs in the family room reading the paper and watching the news on TV when I heard my son's basketball tattoo on the floor of the basement. Normally it was a 'ping' that repeated incessantly as he moved along the floor. Today the sounds were very unusual.

Ping... Ping... Ping... Ping... Ping... thump followed by a long pause. Then a new pattern occurred.

Ping... Ping... Ping... Ping... Ping... Ping... Ping... Ping... thump again followed by a long pause.

After three episodes of varying patterns, I decided I had to investigate. I got out of my chair, walked across the floor, opened the door to the basement and looked down. There I saw the most amazing sight. My son James was busy bouncing the basketball while he was wearing a blindfold. He reached out, touched the steel post in front of him, and started bouncing the basketball while in a crouched position and moved quickly along the floor. He was doing well until he ran into the other post. This accounted for the thump. I had to find out what this was all about.

"Jim, I was upstairs reading the paper when I heard you practicing down here. I recognize the sound of the basketball hitting the concrete on a regular basis but that thump attracted my attention. What are you trying to do?"

"Dad I've got to get on the varsity. I have to be able to move the ball up the court without looking at the ball. If you turn your eyes to watch the ball, they will steal it from you and your speed moving down the court will slow down. I decided to teach myself how to dribble the ball without looking at it. Therefore, I came down here, put on a blindfold, and decided to dribble around the basement. Unfortunately, the posts holding up the ceiling keep getting in my way. But I'm definitely getting better at this."

Jim went on to play varsity basketball at his local high school, Bishop Guertin, and with the all-state players on the team, they were quite effective. When he went to Holy Cross he was not big enough to play at their level of basketball and so became the captain of both the track team and the cross-country team. When he went to Oxford in England, he was so capable that he played on Oxford's varsity all around Europe and received a full blue, which is the equivalent of a college letter in England.

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