**From Bullied Student to NBA Player, Felix Had to Fight to Earn His Spot**

**By Candace Buckner, Washington Post on 10.19.17**

When Carrick Felix stands in front of his audience as a motivational speaker, he begins by sharing the personal snapshots of his life: The teachers who said he'd never graduate high school, and the bullies who persisted because how easy it was to pick on the then-pipsqueak ... the nights sleeping in his car while a student-athlete at Arizona State University, and the night he almost lost basketball.

The last story goes that Felix was playing for the Santa Cruz (California) Warriors, the minor league affiliate of the National Basketball Association's Golden State franchise in Northern California. He had already been cast aside by two other teams, missed substantial time in his young career due to injury, and it was about to get worse. Just before taking off for a dunk, Felix planted his foot and felt his left kneecap snap in two. "I swear it was like a life-flashing moment," Felix said.

The injury led him on a tour of self-discovery in which he reinvented himself as an app developer in Silicon Valley, as well as the Tony Robbins for school students or college athletes. This week, though, Felix can once again call himself an NBA player. On Sunday, Felix defied the odds as a non-guaranteed training camp invitee and made the Washington Wizards' (District of Columbia) regular 17-man roster, completing an improbable two-year comeback from his fractured left patella.

"I'm happy for him," coach Scott Brooks said. "He's one of those players you want him to have success. He's had some tough times early in his career and he fought back and he's stayed positive and kept working. He's earned this spot. He wasn't given it. He earned it." After most Wizards' practices, the 27-year-old Felix is the last player on the court. Even the mundane routine of free-throw shooting sparks the megawatt smile on his face. It wasn't always this way -- Felix once hated basketball.

An Air Force family, the Felix clan bounced between states. While his two older brothers found stability in basketball -- with mom, Beverly, coaching -- Felix was 5-foot-5 with skills that lagged behind his peers. Instead, 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 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 and said he was "bullied." It also didn't help that Felix was diagnosed with attention-deficit disorder and was stigmatized 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." Before his sophomore year, Felix sprouted in height and with this growth spurt, his passion for basketball developed as well. 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.

Focus and decision-making can be a struggle for someone diagnosed with ADD. And Felix, described at that time in his life as "wayward" by his former ASU assistant coach Dedrique Taylor, became overwhelmed and took the difficult path. He continued to play basketball but gave every dime of his student-athlete stipend 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, Taylor stopped Felix for a "come to Jesus meeting" in the parking lot. Felix sprawled out on his car in tears, finally confessing 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 took Taylor's advice on changing his daily habits to heart. He made the Pac-12 all-defensive team and 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. "It was one of the best metamorphoses that I've been a part of and I've seen with my own eyes," Taylor said.

Felix spent his rookie season mostly in the minors where he slightly fractured his left knee and missed over a month. Felix was traded to Utah and waived before the start of the 2014-15 season. Golden State's affiliate picked him up and early in the season, Felix experienced the devastating knee injury. "I was told I would never be able to play the game of basketball again," Felix said. 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 travel app ZNGIT that pre-books outdoor recreation experiences for travelers. Felix toured several schools and shared his inspirational journey.

On Sunday morning as Felix walked into the Wizards' home locker room, he began receiving congratulations from the guys he can now call teammates. That's when he knew it was official, and that now has a new snapshot to share.

"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."