

## **What Being Tall Means to Me**

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Being tall on the basketball court has some clear advantages. You have longer arms to reach in and knock the ball loose to force a turnover. You can help get your team and the crowd fired up with a dunk at the right time when you need momentum. You can block a shot and make the other team think twice before coming back into the lane. Height on the court is almost always seen as one of the best traits you can be born with.

Off the court, though, I've learned that the things that really matter have nothing to do with height. I passed my dad up physically a few years ago, but I still look up to him more than anyone because of the way he works, treats people, and shows up for our family. Being tall might make people physically look up to you, but there are a lot of other qualities you need if you want to be someone people respect.

Growing up in a small community like I have in Scott County, Virginia, you don't really get the option to go unnoticed regardless of your height. There aren't any strangers in a school with less than 200 students. I'm also the oldest of six grandkids, and I realized pretty early on that comes with responsibility. Even though it used to bother me, my younger cousins pay attention to everything I do. Whether I'm playing sports, sitting in the stands, or just hanging out, I know they're watching how I act. Being tall makes that even more obvious, because it naturally draws attention and makes it harder to just blend in. This has helped me learn early that how I act impacts more than just me, especially when younger kids are around.

Sports are where this shows up the most. Games can get intense, especially when emotions run high or things aren't going your team's way. I know that because of my size and position, I could react physically or say something back and probably get away with it. But I also know my teammates are watching, and so are younger players who want to be out there someday. As a captain, I've learned that staying calm helps everyone else do the same. Leading doesn't mean showing how tough you are. It means setting the right example when things get hard. Height alone doesn't make you a leader, and it definitely doesn't make you better than anyone else. Some of the people I respect most aren't big at all, but they have strong character and treat others the right way. Watching my dad and my coaches lead by example has shown me that real influence comes from consistency and hard work, not size.

As I think about college and what comes next, being tall will probably still make me stand out. I've learned that being visible is only a good thing if you handle it the right way. To me, being tall means understanding that responsibility and trying to make choices I can be proud of after the game is over. I know I still have a lot to learn, but I want to use the opportunities I've been given to make my family proud of me and to be someone worth looking up to for reasons that go far beyond height.