

## ***Jump Shot*** Oceana Chamberlin

Breathe. In through the nose, out through the mouth. Focus. Make the other team wear themselves out. Focus on what number 12 is going to do, you've picked up that every time she moves her hand that way, she's going to crossover and pass to her left. You just have to be patient for it...patient...THERE! Juniper lunged for the ball with only seconds left in the tied game. Breathe. Focus. She races down the court to hit her sweet spot, puts up the jump shot and...

BEEP. BEEP. BEEP. *Ughhhh*. Juniper lazily opens up one eye, her bed head in full force as she blows a piece of the long strawberry blonde hair away. Her alarm clock reads 4:45 a.m.. Why does she insist on doing this to herself? She wallows in self-pity for another minute before ripping the blankets off and jumping out of bed. If she's going to seize the day, she's going to have to start now.

Today is the day. The old basketball gym on campus is finished being remodeled, and now she has a place just a few minutes away from her dorm room where she can put up a few shots. Maybe even get a rec league started. She throws on her running clothes and shoes to head outside and start her day off with a quick two-mile run. This was a habit that was developed in high school when she was training with traveling basketball teams, and it just seemed easy to continue because she could run almost anywhere she went. Her long slender legs were definitely built for distance, and it wasn't even until recently she started filling her 5'8" beanpole self out. The miles passed by quickly, and afterwards she hit the showers, grabbed a yogurt and bagel from the cafeteria, and headed to class.

Her parents were a little bummed to find out she wasn't going to pursue basketball in college, and if Juniper was being honest, she was too. Her dad helped her fall in love with the sport at a young age, and growing up they would scrimmage almost every day. But in the last year, her dad's health had started diminishing, and even though nobody said it out loud, Juniper decided to stick to the local college so she could be home more often. By the time she had decided this, WWU had already sent out their offer letters, and Juniper hadn't even been on their radar. That's fine though, just more time to focus on her career to become a physical therapist.

Finally, lunchtime came, and on Tuesdays that meant an early day out of class. She stopped by her dorm to grab her well-loved basketball and set off to see what this new gym was about. Juniper arrived at the historical building and felt right at home with the smell of the wood floors. The empty gym echoed with each bounce, but that's alright. You could feel the history in there, knowing at one point game after game was jam-packed with wild crowds cheering on their teams. This gym felt like home more than any dorm room ever could.

She had been there for what seemed like hours, lost in the zone when she noticed gradually that some girls had been trickling in. One of them, a tall, and WOW was she tall, blonde girl started walking towards her. Tall blondie called out, "Hey, are you here for the open try outs? I guess the boys booked the gym at the same time, so they had us move, but nobody knows if this is the right place."

Juniper paused...oh no...try outs? "Oh, uhm, I'm not sure, I was just here shooting around."

Blondies eyes went wide. "You don't plan on trying out? Girl, I have watched you shoot this whole time without missing a single shot inside the arc. If *you're* not trying out, what kind of talent is?"

Juniper could feel the blood rushing to her cheeks, as she tried to find the right words for such a compliment. "I mean, I played growing up, but I thought WWU's roster was full?"

"Oh, it was, until two of the new recruits got it trouble over the summer and got their scholarships pulled. But it was too late to have anybody apply new or transfer into the school, so Coach Trina is looking to fill up those spots with current students."

Juniper's eyes widened. "Oh wow! Well, I mean me being here at the same time seems to almost be a sign, what's there to lose?"

"That's the spirit! Hey, I'm Taylor by way. What was your name again?"

"Juniper, uh, this is my first year here, so I am still figuring my way around. I was just stoked to see this gym opening up so close to the dorms."

Right then a shrill whistle blew. "LADIES, if you are here for the try-outs, line up over here for paperwork. The rest of you – OUT"

A short haired lady, no taller than 5' bobbed between girls stretching. She wore sweats and a long sleeve, with her sleeves rolled up. Even though her hair was silver, she couldn't have been any older than her mid 30's. Clipboard in hand as she pointed it at girls and directing everybody of where to go and how she wanted them to line up-this had to be Coach Trina. Juniper was a bit taken back that such a successful basketball program was being taught by somebody who seemed so young.

Taylor smiled so big, showing off her perfect sparkling teeth, "Juniper. I have the feeling WWU's basketball team is going to get two really cool new freshmen. Let's show them what we got."

The next two hours almost made Juniper regret waking up so early to do her run. But at the same time, thankful she continued to stay in shape. During the sign-up portion she found out there would be shooting drills, then splitting off to do position work, followed by two fifteen-minute scrimmages. Juniper had looked around at the other eleven girls who showed up, realizing quick that there would be very little resting during the running clock scrimmage, and each girl would be hard pressed even if they didn't do all of the shooting drills beforehand. This meant she would have to pace herself early.

During the shooting drills, Juniper could feel Coach Trina eyeballing her. She didn't say anything, just watched as Juniper worked around the different spots. Shot. If it was a miss, grabbing the rebound and shooting from that spot. If she made it, she would grab the ball, toss it out somewhere and then grab it again to put up another shot from a new spot. It was soothing, just shot after shot. Nothing but her and the ball finding their rhythm. Nothing new to Juniper, and if anything helped her calm her nerves.

Position work was interesting in itself, because of her height and speed Juniper had constantly switched between point guard and shooting guard. She was a little taller than most point guards but had great ball handling skills. Her accuracy both inside and outside the three-point arc made her an even more competitive shooting guard. Two assistant coaches showed up during this time, to help run the individual stations and take notes. But the only thing Coach Trina said to her that whole first hour was for Juniper to switch between the two stations, probably to get a feel for her strengths and weaknesses. Juniper wished Taylor was with her to talk about the drills, but she was at the far end with all the Posts, working on

offensive and defensive moves under the basket. For all that height, it was surprising to see Taylor flow so smoothly and coordinated during those drills. Easily a standout, and a top contender to make the team.

Finally – game time. Coach Trina and the assistants divided the team up, six girls on each team. It would be a running clock – so no timeouts or breaks. Each assistant coach would work the subs in naturally throughout the game, and it was just down to leaving everything you had on the court. Juniper was bummed to find her and Taylor on opposite teams for the first scrimmage but saw a few strong shooters on her own team. Having been observing most of the other girls’ strengths and weaknesses throughout the try outs, she noticed the teams were fairly balanced in talent, but her team had an offensive advantage with the amount of good shooters. Fifteen minutes later her assumptions were correct because they ended up winning thirty-one to twenty-three. Her team had too much speed and accuracy to be stopped from moving around and finding open spots.

They took a five-minute break while the coaches got together to decide the next two teams.

Taylor came over to the end of the bench where Juniper was catching her breath. “Wow, they sure are working us, I can’t believe we still have another full scrimmage to get through!”

Juniper could tell as she looked around that most of the girls were already pretty gassed. “Ya, I mean I do some running every day, but nothing like this type of conditioning. Hey, you did a great job by the way, that move you do - faking to the right, but then turning to your left to shoot a layup underneath the other side is throwing everybody off!”

Taylor chuckled, “I *love* that move. Most people don’t realize it though, but when I do that, everybody sinks towards me. Because they overcompensate, it leaves that whole corner by the free throw open every time if anybody would ever just slide in there for me to ditch the ball to. Probably a more reliable shot than me shooting a reverse layup against two or three girls every time. Hopefully we get to be on the same team this time!”

Right then the whistle blew. Coach Trina yelled out the teams, and to their delight, Juniper and Taylor were on the same team - but so were the four weakest players. This would be a fight to the end if they wanted to keep up with the other team. But as they started playing, what the team lacked in talent

they more than made up for in communication and teamwork. They worked fluidly, passing the ball, and reading each other's moves until a good shot could be put up. Having endurance was an advantage in itself at this point. And as the clock ran down to the final minute, it was to everybody's surprise that the teams were tied up thirty-two to thirty-two.

Neither Juniper nor Taylor had been subbed out in over ten minutes. With no breaks in sight, they knew they needed to dig deep and give it their all this last minute. On the defense, they played a zone, trying to conserve all the energy they could by guarding their respective areas instead of following an individual player. As the ball was passed around from the outside, Juniper could see the girl's eyes reveal where she would pass next. She trusted her gut – overstepping that direction and just in time for the ball to enter the air and right into Juniper's hands! She had the ball and started racing down the court. Everybody was giving it their all to get back in time to stop her, and not wanting to be sloppy she pulled back and started letting the girls set up. 30 seconds left. They needed to make this final shot count.

Claire opened up on the right wing, so Juniper passed it to her. Taylor was fighting under the basket to maintain an offensive spot. Claire saw her open up for a split second and in one bounce got the ball quickly to Taylor. Ten seconds left. This was it. Taylor faked to her right, her move! Juniper naturally took a step over, just in time to see Taylor in action coming back over to the left to power dribble under the basket. Five seconds left. All of a sudden three girls closed in on her. Four seconds. Three. Taylor and Juniper locked eyes for just a moment, but long enough for Taylor to grin mischievously as she launched the ball to Juniper, "SHOOT!" Juniper's quick realization as she posed to catch the ball. Two seconds. Ball in hand, she puts up her jump shot...swish!

The buzzer went off, hardly audible over the cheers of her teammates. Everybody gathered around congratulating and celebrating such a great final minute. Lots of pats on the backs and good games, as everybody sauntered back to the benches to start cool downs. Juniper and Taylor went over the entire game, stretching and talking about each other's highlights. So engrossed in their recaps, they didn't even notice they were the only two left. Coach Trina walked out of the locker room and looked over at them, "You two, practice starts Monday and I better keep seeing what I saw out there today".