

Difficult to lose my role model Kobe

Dear Kobe,
As a black man I am pressured not to show a lot of emotion, because its seen as weakness. But the pain I felt was too much to keep bottled up.

We lost you.

I cried.

I spent the day hoping I was having a bad dream. I hoped the reports were false and that you hadn't gotten on the helicopter. As reports solidified it became clear I was wide awake. It felt as if my heart was in a vice.

Tears rolled down my cheek, memories rolled through my mind.

I remember being a three-year-old kid in South Central Los Angeles who watched in awe as you soared through the air and hit one jaw-dropping shot after another.

I practiced game-winning shots I saw you make in my backyard. Time after time the countdown to the buzzer rang in my head:

"Five... four... three... two... one. Kobe!"

I saw you float the ball into Shaq's extended hands in the 2000 Western Conference finals, then jump into his arms to ignite a string three straight championships.

You were my favorite player and so much more. You became my hero, an inspiration.

After watching you play, I tried my best to imitate your moves.

I watched you beat the Celtics to win your fifth championship. I saw you chase down the long pass from Lamar Odom to end the series, and jump on the announcer's table in celebration with the Los Angeles crowd.

You became one with the city

You were from Philadelphia.

But you became L.A.

We experienced great emotions together. We have been happy, angry, disappointed, frustrated and proud.

There were ups and downs, I don't think we would have it any other way.

As the confetti showered down your parade, I could not contain my excitement. I did what you inspired me to do every time I watched you play. I found a court and worked because I wanted to do what you just did.

I wanted to be a champion.

I wanted to be like you.

As the minutes turned to hours, then months to years, it became clear that no matter how hard I tried there was only one Kobe.

And I was okay with that.

But I was going to continue to play because the "Mamba Mentality" wouldn't let me quit. It became part of my life, driving my athletic career and educational endeavours.

I refused to listen to excuses in my mind when life got tough. Whenever I heard that inner voice, your voice would drown it. Your voice said: "If you want to be great, you have to put the work in."

So, I listened and I am thankful that I did.

That mentality has allowed me to excel as an athlete, a student and a journalist.

That is all thanks to you Kobe.

You learned hard lessons in the public eye of the Los Angeles media. Watched and learned. For that I am forever grateful.

You entered the NBA as a 17-year-old kid, I watched you grow up as I grew up. Flamboyant babyface Kobe evolved into the killer Black Mamba, then finally post-retirement philosophical Kobe. Your maturation came as I grew from a child to a man. I watched from afar, but I felt as if we grew together, which is probably why losing you hurt so much more. It feels as if I lost an older cousin or a childhood friend.

We also lost eight others, including your daughter Gianna.

Her light was beginning to shine bright for all to see. She was the torch who would carry on the Bryant name in the basketball world.

She was a young lady with much talent, great work ethic and a true student of the game. She was truly your daughter in so many ways.

Now that you are gone, all we have are memories and the lessons you taught. I will carry them with me and cherish them as long as I shall live.

You were never shy or afraid to take a shot or do what was needed to be successful on the court, and I will take with that mindset from the court in my life.

"Five... four... three... two... one.

Goodbye Kobe."