

MY AFRICAN AMERICAN HERO

I opened the door on my first day of high school and could feel all the emotions racing through my mind. My hands trembled with excitement while my stomach filled with anxious butterflies. Over the next four years, I would be learning and growing, succeeding and flourishing, at rates that I could not imagine. However, I would also be subjected to disappointment and failure, and forced to believe in myself when the path of life became rocky. Nevertheless, when I met Oceanside football coach Nate Green, I would soon realize that God put the right people in my life, at the right time, and for the right reasons.

Coach Nate and I had a bond from the very first time we said hello. He was a football coach at our high school, yet he attended each and every one of my volleyball games. Better yet, he attended school functions such as pep rallies, ceremonies, and senior day. Coach Nate had a genuine heart for the students. As an African American high school football coach, Coach Nate used his compassion and became a mentor for high school students who needed a boost of motivation. "Don't be afraid of failure because that is the only way you can improve", he would say as we entered the volleyball gym. He was determined to spend his time, each and every day, influencing the lives of high school athletes.

A few months later, I learned that Coach Nate was my mom's patient at Hollings Cancer Center. He was battling lymphoma. I was surprised, as I always heard my mom talk about how sick lymphoma patients can be. Coach Nate was sick. Honestly, he was very sick, battling life threatening lymphoma that was eating away at his physical body. Yet there he was, still cheering me on at every volleyball game. There he was, giving high fives in the hallways after school. There he was with a huge grin on his face every day ready to make the life of the students better. Coach Nate brought the Oceanside family together.

I will never be able to tell Oceanside Collegiate Academy football coach Nate Green how much he influenced my life. He taught me how to have courage, how to have strength during times of disappointment, and how to believe in myself. As an African American, I know that he was an inspiration to athletes struggling to be somebody. While Coach Nate's physical body was dying from cancer, he was mentally and emotionally present to make a difference in the lives of teenagers, including mine. Coach Nate showed me how to be dedicated and how to be present for the people that I care about, no matter what my circumstances might be. When I went to visit Coach Nate in the hospital, the last words he said to me were "winners always finish. Love God, be smart, work hard, and always finish". I will remember those words for the rest of my life.