

Big Shot

How a lucky Hail Mary sinker helped me save my dad and made me an optimist for life

When I was 7, I lived and breathed basketball. Originally, my dad had dragged me, kicking and

screaming like a little baby, to the tryouts.

And thank God, because I grew to love the sport, and because one game ended up shaping my entire life.

My father was the coach of my YMCA team, and we had made it to the championship game. We were up 24–23, with about 10 seconds left, when my dad got a technical foul for yelling at the ref or something. The other team got two shots, and they made both. It was officially my father's fault that we were now losing this game. We were little kids playing in f—king YMCA, so obviously it made him look pretty terrible. All the parents were giving him the evil eye.

It was up to me to save the day. On the next play, I received an inbound pass, and like most lefty players do when they're 6 or 7, I dribbled myself into a corner. With about one second left, I hurled up a shot. It was hideous looking. I was falling out of bounds...it was really dramatic. Still to this day, I don't know how it went in, but it did. The buzzer sounded.

The first person I looked to was my dad. He's not a religious man, but he had fallen to his knees and thanked God. If it had



ALL-STAR
Playing YMCA basketball as a kid (below) gave Adam Levine his first taste of success... and fame.

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been some random coach, it wouldn't have meant so much, but it was my dad, and he still tells this story with the same significance. I had carried him, as a kid.

After I looked at him, I turned around.

There were maybe 50 to 100 people there. When I saw the crowd jump out of its seats and start screaming, something must have ignited in me. There are definite similarities between that feeling and the one you get playing to a sold-out stadium. I remember it like it was yesterday: being lifted onto my teammates' shoulders, the burgers afterward at Hamburger Hamlet, everything. Feeling like a bit of a hero for a night was something I took with me. I had my first taste of what it was like to be cool, which was seductive. My second taste was when I joined a band (well, there aren't many relatively short Jews in the NBA). Maybe that

shot is why I turned into an optimist...and a bit of a cocky son of a bitch.

A decade later, my first band, Kara's Flowers, was signed to a major label, and they pumped our heads full of hopes and dreams. I was sure we were going to become the biggest band in the world. I was 18 and completely delusional, and sure enough, our album flopped. But I think I was somehow equipped to deal with it. I thought to myself, *Well, this didn't work this time.* I've spent time watching the ball fall short, but I got a taste very young of what it feels like when it sinks through the net. And even if the ball hadn't gone in that day, eventually it would have. That's how I saw it at 7 and at 18, and how I still see it at 30.

And if that shot had bounced off the rim all those years ago? Who knows. Maybe today I'd be a serial killer or something.

AS TOLD TO AMY LEVIN-EPSTEIN

Adam Levine is the lead singer of Maroon 5. The band is currently on tour with the Counting Crows.