

As Years Go By

Sometimes I think of how I was on the basketball court in the past. I remember in high school I had a ton of self confidence. I used to play one-on-one with my friend Hoyt Cousins in his sideyard. Our senior year he was our center on the varsity and I was the shooting/playmaking guard. He was much taller and pretty quick for a big man and could dribble well, such that he should have beaten me every time. But I developed a special move just for him, spinning across the key and going up for a little left-handed hook. I put out this air that I couldn't lose cause I just didn't think I could. I had Hoyt pretty much psyched out. He was a sweet kid and at the time it seemed like he questioned himself a bit more than I did. It felt good to be strong and in control of my movements. When I was a junior I was the off guard. Billy Mayo was the star and he would pump the ball up from almost anywhere. He had a large ego and swagger and that's when I began to be aware of the downside of too much self confidence. It often comes with a price and may be the result of a perspective that is artificially narrow. For me this came home when halfway through senior year it became clear we would probably not even make the state tournament. The other teams had a sense of passing and fastbreaking that we just did not have - and this was class C! The level of play in class B and A was a much higher level than that. This was the first time it dawned on me that I would not become a Pro as I had dreamed throughout my growing up years.

Our coach had all of his right hand fingers missing from an accident with a table saw. Up to this time I was a bit outspoken and was the only player who stood up to the coach for what I, and others on the team, perceived as bad policies, weak strategy and poor coaching. I still blamed him, in my mind, for not teaching us the team based skills other teams had. However I began to reassess it all in light of not being good enough to make the tournament. The question of self confidence and self esteem has fascinated me since. Strong self esteem seems basically healthy and necessary. But could it come from a healthier place than from the sense of self we get by being better than others? And isn't this assessment of being better than others almost always a function of a perspective that is necessarily limited? If Billy Mayo had been playing in the class A division he probably would have been playing second string. It would be fascinating to compare his development as a human being into adulthood based on his experience as a star on a mediocre team in class D vs. a second stringer in class A. Maybe the only way we can achieve a solid sense of self, through sport, is via this way of being better. Or maybe there's another way. (the illusion of separateness)