

KIRKLAND'S KORNER: A father, a son and sports

JOHNATHAN KIRKLAND

Jun 19, 2020

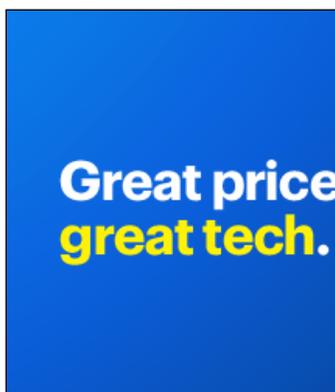


Johnathan Kirland is a sports writer for The Gazette-Virginian. Contact him jkirkland@gazettevirginian.com. Follow him on Twitter @JohnathanK_GV

Father's Day is on Sunday, and I want to wish all of the dads out there a Happy Father's Day. I want to take some time today to talk about the man that got me into sports when I was a kid, my dad.

My father was never the father who forced anything on me. His only rule was whatever I started, I finished. At every single baseball and basketball season growing up, him and my mom would always ask if I wanted to play again. It was none of the whole "you're playing lets go" stuff that so many parents these days do, and I am forever grateful to both of my parents for that because I truly believe my love of sports was genuine because they introduced me to them but never forced them on me.

My dad coached me from 5 years old up until I moved to Babe Ruth baseball. He also coached me in basketball up until the end of elementary school. He taught me how to play the game, and he taught me about respect, sportsmanship and so much more.



He also is responsible for my love of sports in general. If my memory is correct, the first live sports game he ever took me to was at the Robins Center in Richmond where the University of Richmond was playing Wake Forest. There was a young kid playing for the Demon Deacons by the name of Tim Duncan. From that day on, I was hooked.

We went to several Richmond Braves games each year and got to see future stars such as Chipper Jones, Javy Lopez and Ryan Klesko. It was always something I looked forward to when they told my brother and I that we were going to see the Braves.

Then came my love for the University of Virginia. Around Southside Virginia there are not many UVA fans. Those Hokies dominate this area and when I became a UVA fan I caught a lot of flack for that. The reason I became a UVA fan is because of my dad. As far as I know he didn't have an allegiance to either school, but he worked with a guy that had connections at UVA and in 1997 for my 12th birthday my parents got me tickets to the UVA vs. Virginia Tech football game in Charlottesville.

Thomas Jones and Aaron Brooks led the Wahoos to the win, and I was instantly hooked as a UVA fan. The next year or two my dad and a couple of his buddies bought mini season ticket plans for UVA basketball. We would all ride together, and I felt like a part of their group as they laughed and joked on the way to watch the games.

One game in particular that I missed was the UVA vs. Duke basketball game one season. Duke was a perennial powerhouse as they still are now, but the game was in the middle of the week, and it was a late start. I think 9 p.m. Well mom was not having it; she refused to let me go with my dad because I had school the next day. Mom, I know you are reading this and I just want to let you know I still haven't forgot about that!

My mom and dad also took me to my very first hockey game and helped me fall in love with the Carolina Hurricanes. It was 2002, and the Hurricanes made a run to the Stanley Cup Finals that season. We got tickets to see the Hurricanes play the Maple Leafs in the Eastern Conference Finals, and it was an insane atmosphere. I have been to countless hockey games since then and have started to take my son to them.

My dad didn't have to do any of these things. He could have said it cost too much or that he didn't have time, but he always made time to take me to these games, and he always made sure I had the best time.

My father had a subscription to the Richmond Times Dispatch when I was growing up, and he got so used to me coming downstairs every morning before school to read the sports section that eventually he already had the sports section pulled and waiting on me.

He never told me I was doing too much with sports, he never told me that I needed to do something else or focus my time elsewhere. He always supported me through my journey to becoming a sports writer and without his support and guidance growing up I would never be here.

Dad and I still sit and watch sports together from time to time, we will talk about things going on in the sports world as well. He follows everything I write for the paper and always wants to know what is going on with the teams in Halifax even though he lives in Mecklenburg. He always shows interest in what I am doing.

Thank you dad for introducing me to sports and for always pushing me to follow my passion. I am sure you didn't think that what you did for me 30 years ago would propel me into a career with it, but it did and for that I am grateful.

Happy Father's Day!



Johnathan Kirland is a sports writer for The Gazette-Virginian. Contact him jkirkland@gazettevirginian.com. Follow him on Twitter [@JohnathanK_GV](https://twitter.com/JohnathanK_GV)

Johnathan Kirland

Sports writer

Johnathan Kirland is a sports writer for The Gazette-Virginian. Contact him jkirkland@gazettevirginian.com. Follow him on Twitter [@JohnathanK_GV](https://twitter.com/JohnathanK_GV)

KIRKLAND'S KORNER: Silence is complicity

JOHNATHAN KIRKLAND

Jun 5, 2020



Johnathan Kirland is a sports writer for The Gazette-Virginian. Contact him jkirkland@gazettevirginian.com. Follow him on Twitter @JohnathanK_GV

The death of George Floyd and the subsequent week (and still going) of protests around the country speak volumes to a problem that we have in this country when it comes to race. The year 2020 and we are still dealing with racism. It is truly sad to see, and I have some words on it that I want to share.

I grew up blind to the fact that racism existed in this world. I had two loving parents that taught me the golden rule of loving everyone as they are. I lived in a middle class mostly white neighborhood, but my next-door neighbors were African American. Yes, they looked different than me but I never thought of them as less because of that.

I grew up playing sports. I started when I was five years old and played until I was 18. Baseball and basketball were the two I played all the time. I met a boy when I was in elementary school that moved here from Georgia with his mom. He moved in with his cousin and her family and went to school with me. His name was Breon, and he was black. Breon was an extremely talented basketball player, a step above everyone else. I was an average player that just loved to play the game. Breon helped lead our recreation league team to the championship game for the first time since I began playing. I remember dog piling at center court and hugging him after we won the game to make it to the championship.



Breon and I would sleep over at each other's houses. We would go to the movies, and most of all, we bonded over the game of basketball. It didn't matter if it was inside on a Nerf goal in the living room or if it was on the dirt court outside, we loved the game

of basketball, and it brought us together as friends. Now I knew Breon looked different than me and his mom looked different than me but that didn't matter to me because he treated me as his friend, and I in return did the same.

This is not one of those "I don't see color" stories because that is just not true. We all see color. If anyone tells you they don't, they are lying. I learned from an early age that it didn't matter who it was, as long as they were good to you and treated you with respect they were welcome in my parents house.

As I grew older, I began hearing the jokes. I began hearing a name that I had never heard before. It was the N word. I was confused. I was shocked to be hearing this word for the first time. Friends would say it; their dads would say it, and I realized that this wasn't something that they were born with. It was taught. Their parents might not have told them to say it or that it was ok but they grew up hearing that word come out of their parents' mouths and assumed it was ok for them to use it.



If a white female dated a black male, they would call her a name that even thinking it makes me cringe. Some would even call her that to her face. It was then that I realized that this kind of racism wasn't just one or two people. I was a large number of people I grew up around saying these things, and I hate to admit but I almost got swept up in it because "That's what everyone is doing." I felt trapped. I didn't know what to say or what to do. I knew it was wrong but I was scared to say anything because I would be cast aside. I considered these people my friends, and I didn't want to lose them, but at the same time I absolutely hated what I was seeing and hearing when it came to their racism.

My senior year of high school, I played basketball with close to 30 kids combined on the JV and varsity teams. It was me and one other player that were white, the rest were black. I was never treated different, and I was never bullied. My race didn't matter to them.

We were friends, and we were teammates. I still speak to them when I see them and just recently we all reminisced over our playing together in a Facebook post that one of the players started. I didn't see why people treated black people differently. I was so blind to what was right in front of me and looking back I feel so dumb for not seeing it.

As I got older, I started reading. I started reading about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. I started reading about Malcolm X. I read books by Ta-Nehisi Coates and Toni Morrison. I listened to African Americans stories about their experiences with racism or racial profiling by the police and others. I began to listen more intently because I realized I was clueless about the situation. I didn't speak because it wasn't my place to speak. As a white male, I will never understand what they are going through. I will never be stopped late at night and asked where I am going. I will never be asked if I belong at a certain place. I will never hear people say mean and racist things to me based solely on the color of my skin. The list goes on and on of the things that black people have to endure each and every day that will never happen to me. What I have done to educate myself isn't enough. I have to continue to educate myself and also to stop turning my head like I did for too long growing up.

The basis behind this whole column, the reason I have said what I said is to tell the African American community that I care. I see you, and I love you. I will stand up beside you and speak out on the injustices that I see happen. I will do my part to continue to educate myself and to educate my son so that he will know that these things still happen, but we can do our part to help any way we can.

There's a phrase that people on the internet throw around at sports writers, players and coaches that speak out on the things that I have just said and that phrase is "Stick to sports." I have a duty to myself and to those around me to not sit silent. Silence is compliance, and I refuse to do that anymore after I did it for way too long when I was in high school.



Johnathan Kirland is a sports writer for The Gazette-Virginian. Contact him jkirkland@gazettevirginian.com. Follow him on Twitter [@JohnathanK_GV](https://twitter.com/JohnathanK_GV)

Johnathan Kirland

Sports writer

Johnathan Kirland is a sports writer for The Gazette-Virginian. Contact him jkirkland@gazettevirginian.com. Follow him on Twitter [@JohnathanK_GV](https://twitter.com/JohnathanK_GV)

KIRKLAND'S KORNER: Sports are more than a game

JOHNATHAN KIRKLAND

Jun 12, 2020

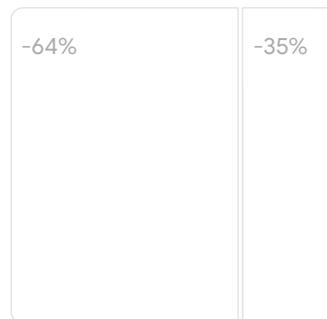


Johnathan Kirland is a sports writer for The Gazette-Virginian. Contact him jkirkland@gazettevirginian.com. Follow him on Twitter @JohnathanK_GV

I have had a lot of time in the last few months to think about what sports means as a whole to our society. You know the old saying “You don’t know what you’ve got ‘till it’s gone?” That most definitely applies to these last three months or so. Sports are a distraction for us during hard times, but they also can teach us a lot as well.

Sports taught me about working together with others. The concept of teamwork that you need your entire life was taught to me at a young age thanks to sports. I learned to pass the ball to teammates on the basketball court. I learned to work with players on the field in baseball to ensure we knew who was going to do what in certain situations. In football if you are a running back or quarterback you have to rely on your lineman to protect you and they also need to know you, and your tendencies to best protect you or how to block so you can gain those extra yards.

All of these things you have to have in life to be successful. I cannot come into work every day and write whatever I want whenever I want without letting anyone know. Even if I write what I want I still need someone to lay it out on the page for me. I still need someone to get it ready to go on the press and then be printed. I still need someone to put my work online so others can read it. In just my job alone I have to constantly work with other people to ensure that the sports section is right each and every issue, and I am sure that goes for every job out there.

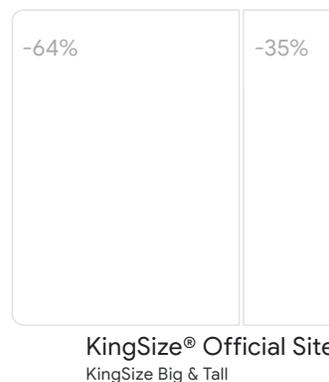


KingSize® Official Site
KingSize Big & Tall

Of course you can learn teamwork and other traits in places other than sports, but playing it and learning it through experience helped me in ways that I didn’t know.

You also learn to win and lose and how to handle that. I remember my dad coaching me every year in baseball and basketball until I was probably close to 12 years old. He taught my teammates and I about winning and losing and how to handle those situations. We knew how bad losing felt, but we also knew that we had to give it our best effort each time out and if we still came up short we at least knew it wasn't because of lack of effort.

One of the biggest things in my opinion that sports can do for children is to give them a place to be a kid. There are a lot of children in this world that have home lives that are horrendous. They may not have parents around to care for them, or they are tasked with growing up and handling things at home that they shouldn't have to at a young age but they do because they are the only ones that can.



We don't know what the person standing right next to us is going through sometimes, and giving these kids an opportunity to play sports and interact with kids their own age can provide them with something that is much bigger than sports.

There are a lot of professional athletes out there today that credit sports with saving their lives. Whether they were headed down the wrong path with whom they hung out with or the things they were doing or whatever the case may be, sports gave them the chance to get out of the places they were in.

Some people don't get sports or they don't like them for whatever reason, and I respect that because that is their opinion, but what I don't like are those that say things about athletes based off of nothing other than what they think. Ask 50 professional athletes from various sports, and I guarantee you that close to half of them will tell you that sports taught them more about life than you ever imagined.

I am currently reading a book titled “All They Had,” and it features sports writing from David Halberstam, and this quote in the book was what inspired me to write this today.

“Sometimes sports mirrors society, sometimes it allows us to understand the larger society a little better. But mostly, it is a world of entertainment, of talented and driven young men and women who do certain things with both skill and passion.”



Johnathan Kirland is a sports writer for The Gazette-Virginian. Contact him jkirkland@gazettevirginian.com. Follow him on Twitter [@JohnathanK_GV](https://twitter.com/JohnathanK_GV)

Johnathan Kirland

Sports writer

Johnathan Kirland is a sports writer for The Gazette-Virginian. Contact him jkirkland@gazettevirginian.com. Follow him on Twitter [@JohnathanK_GV](https://twitter.com/JohnathanK_GV)