ADE ADEPITAN SPEAKS AT THE CAMBRIDGE UNION

On the 26th April 2016 the Cambridge Union Society welcomed wheelchair basketball player and television presenter Ade Adepitan. He started by rewinding the clock back to his birth. He was born in Lagos and unfortunately contracted polio at the age of 15 months old. It affected the left side of his body, and made walking a task that needed to be aided with the callipers such as used in Forest Gump. His family moved from Lagos to the east of London because of Mr Adepitan’s condition as Nigeria did not have the facilities to cater for him.

The first obstacle reached upon arrival in London was finding a suitable school for Ade. The only school for disabled children was many stories high so was not an option. Ade’s parents were forced to put him in a normal school. Ade remembers his first day of school as being one of the hardest of his life. A number of people were worried at that point. The education authorities, teachers and his parents were all worried about the ‘new things happening’, as the school had ‘never had a disabled kid’ before. Most of all Ade himself was worried, but for starkly different reasons, he was wearing ‘pink chequered flared trousers’ and had his hair in an afro so he looked like a ‘microphone head’. But in hindsight he was glad for his unusual appearance because this ‘took [his] mind of [his] physical disability and put it on [his] fashion disability’. He remembers on his first day he found some kids playing football, and asked to play but they just looked at him and shooed him away. In a determined fashion which would prove typical of Ade, he asked to play to consistently that by the final playtime that day they let him play in goal.

During the game he encountered a one on one between himself and a star striker in his school. The boy shot the ball to the right and Ade flew to the right, which was his good side, and landed with the ball in his hands. In those moments he went from being a ‘fashion freak to a sporting hero’.

This was a life-changing moment for another reason. At that moment Ade realised that sport would open doors for him. Ade was spotted as a possible sporting talent by two physiotherapists, who had themselves set up a wheelchair basketball team. But Ade held back from playing a wheelchair sport, because of the stigma attached to the wheelchair. Ade commented that back then he was ‘disgusted about the idea’ of being in a wheelchair. He didn’t see himself as disabled because he went to ‘a normal school’. He ‘avoided looking in a mirror’, because that was the only time he was forced to ponder his disability. However, it got to the point where the walk to school pained him so much he was forced into one. But by surprise when Ade went to school in a wheelchair, his school mates accepted him with open arms. It was because of that reaction that Ade decided he wanted to commit to wheelchair basketball.

Ade had the opportunity at 18 to be selected for the national team. 50 arrived at the camp where a squad of 12 was to be chosen, with people being cut every day. Ade was cut at 15. He thought to himself ‘I’m going to use this as a stepping stone’. Ade spent a few years in Spain playing professionally, and came back to the UK a year before the Olympics to try out for the British
national team. Unfortunately, he was cut at 15 again, thinking ‘I’m not going to sulk’ he continued to train, but was also cut at 15 in the selection process for the World Championships in the next year. He was still determined, and decided ‘to give everything up’ to make it into the squad in the selection process for the Championships in Spain the next year. In this process he was cut at 13 and made the first reserve. He was just one player from making it in the squad, which ‘was the lowest point’ in his life. It was the first time in his life he decided to give up, thinking ‘you’re a fool’ and that he was ‘trying to do something beyond [his] reach’.

Some time later Ade was convinced by his friend to play in a competition in Spain. At the end of the competition, Ade’s team from Hackney was playing against a team from Germany. In the unlikeliest of circumstances Ade’s team won the game in the last few seconds, and this game taught him to ‘never give up’. From that point on he decided that he would ‘never give up again’. He trained for 6 hours every day, setting himself goals and targets. Then the best day of Ade’s life came; when he was selected to be in the Great Britain team for the Sydney Olympics.

Ade Adepitan went on to play a video displaying some of the best moments of his life, when he carried the Olympic torch, beat the USA at the Olympics to reach the semi-finals and crossed Nicaragua for a documentary. He finished with three motivational quotes, telling the chamber to ‘never give up’, ‘challenge yourself’ and ‘don’t not do something because of the fear of failure’.

--END--

For footage of the event go to https://www.youtube.com/user/cambridgeunionsoc

Friday, 07 October 2016