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## **HERTZEL COLUMN: Forsythe's story one of resolve**

By Bob Hertzel Times West Virginian

MORGANTOWN — This is a Christmas story with a sports twist, a story that were it not real would surely have been written by Charles Dickens.

It comes courtesy of Caroline Atkins, a professor at West Virginia who runs a program entitled “Athletes Speak Out,” a course in public speaking for athletes, who tell personal stories, some that literally can bring a tear to your eye, stories that always end in a lesson that has to be learned to be successful in life.

As personal as they are, many of them are quite similar, experiences with drugs or grades or death of a friend in a shooting or a family member. They are tales of kids almost gone bad or kids who had someone lead them down the right path, be it a brother, a mother, father, teacher or coach.

Some, though, rise above it all, to have that certain something extra that turns it from a speech prepared for a class to one that simply exudes class.

This year's was delivered by David Forsythe, a soft-spoken, humble Ohioan who is a freshman center on Bob Huggins' men's basketball team, a player struggling for an identity of his own on the court, recently battling back problems that could retard his progress.

But it is not a basketball story at all, nor is he really the central figure in the tale he told.

This is the story of a father and son relationship, one that had much to overcome, yet one that has worked out.

It begins for David Forsythe when he was a baby living in Medina, Ohio, with his mother, who had divorced from his father, Patrick, when he was still a babe.

There came a day during Forsythe's second year that ... let us let Forsythe explain.

“One day, when I was about two, she dropped me off at my grandparents — and never returned,” he tells the children at the schools in which he speaks.

His grandparents contacted his father, living in Las Vegas with an uncle and still in school, so it was a year before he could send to have his son brought out to him.

Oh, did I mention, Patrick Forsythe had been blind since he was 16.

So there they were, the two of them, but let us return to Forsythe's speech.

“Because of his work and the lack of job opportunities, we moved a lot. When I finally was a high school freshman, I had been in seven different schools,” he said.

It was a nomadic experience, a difficult one.

“Growing up, I never really had a stable environment and never really had a lot of material things; we were always in financial trouble,” David Forsythe explained.

But it didn’t matter.

“My dad has always been there for me and cared for me throughout my life,” Forsythe stressed.

They made do with what they had.

“He made sure that there was always food on the table and clothing on our backs, but that was about it,” Forsythe said. “As a result, I always wanted to go to my friends’ houses because they had things to do....like video games, basketball hoops and ping pong tables.”

The most difficult part, the part that hurt the most was that the two were not able to bond through athletics.

“My dad’s disability prevented him from ever being involved in sports with me,” he said. “He was never able to come to the gym and play or rebound for me.”

This was difficult to live with and it was something that Forsythe never really let out.

“I never said anything but it always hurt and still does knowing that he could never do things like play catch, or more importantly, watch me play basketball,” he said.”iii. Even though my grandparents attended when they were able to, my dad has never seen one of my games. To his credit, he attended every game and sat in the front row, waiting to hear the announcer say my name.”

Basketball was the escape for Forsythe, once he discovered it in the eighth grade, although he didn’t take it seriously until his junior season.

His father emphasized that he could not attend college without a scholarship, and that hit home with him.

He had not been performing well in the classroom but decided to change that, turning a 1.8 freshman grade-point average into 2.7 upon graduation.

He did the same in basketball, informing his coach he wanted to work harder, hitting the weight room, working out all summer. He began traveling with AAU team and played in New York and Las Vegas. With exposure, came interest. You cannot teach 7-feet and Ohio State, Virginia Tech, Cincinnati and WVU came calling.

He chose WVU and says it was simple choice.

Why?

“It had a family feeling,” he said.

In the end, that was what he was looking for, the family structure, the closeness with the coaches, the warmth of teammates.

He has been living the dream is father — yes — envisioned for him.

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