

Heroes & Friends

By Akeem Shavers

I've learned a lot in my life about waiting for chances and being patient. Now, at age 21, I can tell you that patience and persistence are probably the most important characteristics for a young person to have.

My parents raised me to have respect for my elders, to work hard, to accept difficult times and to be confident in myself. It was their interest in seeing me go to college that kept that dream alive. Then, in my senior year of high school, I figured out that I was pretty good at football. At that point I really had never thought about the chance to play college ball; it was one of my dreams but it didn't seem possible. When I was offered a chance at a scholarship at Independence Community College in Kansas, I took it.

But being in Kansas was nothing like being near my friends and family in Redwater, just outside of Texarkana. After my first semester, I knew I wanted to get closer to familiar surroundings. So, I transferred to Tyler and waited my chance to play and contribute.

I came to TJC in the spring of 2009. I'd always played running back, but Tyler had Don Brown in the backfield and I was not going to have a chance to start like I had the previous year. Coach Danny Palmer began to work me out as a defensive back. Not starting and not playing my favorite position was not what I preferred, but I know it is a team game and I knew if I continued to work hard, my chance to contribute, somehow, would come.

A bigger disappointment was that, because the league only allows five transfers in a year, I would have to wait a year to play in a game. Still, I went to every practice and delivered my best every day. During that year I worked on my strength and quickness. In the classroom, I worked just as hard, because I knew I wanted to graduate from TJC after the Fall semester of 2010.

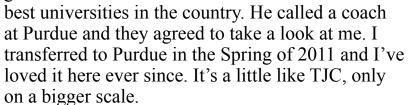
TJC prepared me very well. The class sizes and campus size were just right and they helped me learn how to study, to stay focused on what's important and to keep my mind focused.

I took pride in being consistent in the classroom, on the practice field and in game situations. In 2010, I got the chance to contribute at running back.

I had some good runs and made some plays that helped keep us in ballgames. Against Blinn, I had two long runs against a quick and physical defense.

We ended the year at 3-5, but I felt good about being an Apache.

Then, Coach Palmer worked some magic to get me into one of the



Going to TJC was the best decision I could have made and it opened doors.

Coach George Cumby was a big influence on me. He made me mentally and spiritually stronger; he made it seem like what we're going through now isn't as bad as we think it is. He really opened my eyes. I had some great teachers, too, like Dr. Michael Mast. He is a very good Texas government teacher. He made history fun and interesting. I left TJC with a 3.0 grade-point average and that made getting into Purdue possible.

At Purdue, I have some great teachers, too. It was a little bit of a shock to see 500 people in one classroom with one teacher, but we meet with academic advisors weekly, so we know exactly what we've got to do. I'm working toward a bachelor's degree in business management and I know I'll be successful by being consistent, patient and persevering. I'd like to do something that helps others athletically, like start a gym or training facility. Of course, I watch the NFL combines and think about what it would be like to be a pro, too. If it is meant to happen, it will.

Good things come to those who wait but who work hard while waiting. I'm thankful TJC was interested in giving me a chance. That wait was well worth it.

TJC Hero and Friend Akeem Shavers was a record-setting, standout football player at Redwater High School where he rushed for 1,100 yards in his senior year, 331 yards of which he achieved in just one game. At Tyler Junior College, Shavers rushed for 450 yards while averaging nine yards per carry and scoring three touchdowns. Against Northeastern A&M, Shavers had an 80 yard touchdown run and rushed for 210 yards. He was named to the second team of the 2010 All Southwest Junior College Football Conference. This season at Purdue University, Shavers was a starting tailback, rushing for 534 yards and six touchdowns. Shavers saved his best performance for when it was needed most, running for 149 yards against Western Michigan in the Little Caesar's Pizza Bowl, Dec. 27 in Detroit, Mich., leading the Boilermakers to a 37-32 victory. Shavers was named the game's Most Valuable Player.

