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Pro Says He Plays Better Because He's A Christian

By Lynn M. Davis Jr.
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While the National Anthem rang out just prior to the National Basketball Association's All Star game at Cincinnati in January, a six-foot two-inch guard from the Cincinnati Royals' professional basketball bowed his head in prayer.

Adrian Smith, a Southern Baptist prayed not to win, but for strength from God to do his best.

After the game, Smith was voted the most valuable player in the game, leading the Eastern All Stars to a 137-94 victory over the West.

Smith, with a note of humility in his voice, said later that he didn't play the game any different than any other game he's ever played. "I just went out there and gave it all I've got. I'd have been happy just to sit on the bench and wear the uniform."

This willingness to give is characteristic of Adrian Smith, not only in basketball but in his daily life as a Christian as well. And, he credits much of his good ball playing to his belief in God.

He believes that tensions and pressures that bothered him as a ball player before he became a Christian are not as great now.

"I always ask God for strength during the National Anthem," he said. "I never ask God for anything unusual, just strength to play my best."

"When the game is over," said Smith, "I've probably played a better ball game because I'm a Christian."

According to his pastor, Smith worked for his Lord with the same vigorous energy he demonstrates on the basketball court.

Arthur Patterson, pastor of the First Baptist Church of College Hill in Cincinnati, says that the busy basketball star is a good steward of everything he possesses.

"When he is in town," said Patterson of Smith, "he attends every church service. He is always willing to visit, and does so on his own."

His pastor describes Smith as "a soul-winning visitor" who takes advantage of opportunities to tell others about his Christian experience.

Since high school days, Smith has been a winner. After being named to an All America basketball team while playing for the University of Kentucky, he went on to play on the United States Pan American team in 1959. In 1960 he played on the U. S. Olympic team in Rome.

Smith feels that each of these are great events in his life. "But the greatest thing that happened to me was when I was saved--before this, I had only lived basketball, he said.

Smith became a Christian in September of 1963, just one year after he and his wife, Paula, were married. He attributes her Christian influence as a great factor in his decision to accept Christ.

Said he: "I used to go to church when I felt like it. I never did make it a habit. Then, after I met Paula, I started going to church with her. I realized that I lacked something. I used to sit in the (church) service and enjoy it, but I really didn't have my heart in it."

For Smith, new life came in the living room of his own home one night after watching Billy Graham on Television. "I just got down on my knees and asked God to save me," he said.

He and his wife joined the College Hill church, a Southern Baptist congregation affiliated with the Greater Cincinnati Baptist Association. The College Hill church, still meeting in rented quarters, had to borrow the baptistry of another church in Cincinnati in order to baptize Smith. He was baptized at the Springdale Baptist Church just before a night ball game.

Thus began new life for Adrian Smith. His life was changed. His basketball game improved.

Today he lives as a Christian like he plays basketball--he gives it all he's got.