



Underdog: A Jimmy Butler Story

By: Austin Rader

September 28, 2020 — When you hear the name Jimmy Butler, what comes to mind? Is it the tenacious defense, his ability to get open for easy buckets cutting to the hoop, his transition offense. Or is it simply his work ethic, and putting in more hours than the opposition.

After this season's playoff run, you can add leader to the list.

Last night Jimmy Butler led the Miami Heat to the franchise's 6th NBA Finals appearance. The Heat were counted out from the beginning. They were underdogs from the start. It goes hand and hand with Jimmy Butler's upbringing.

Being an underdog.

The origin story of Jimmy Butler is the making of a movie. Butler was born in Tomball, Texas, a suburb of Houston. At a young age, he was abandoned by his father leaving him with just his mother. At age 13, his mother kicked him out of the house with her last words being, "I don't like the look of you. You gotta go."

Throughout middle school and most of high school, Jimmy bounced around friends' couches. It wasn't until his senior year of high school when the mother of one of his friends took him in and made him a part of the family.



Basketball wasn't always Jimmy's sport. Football actually was, until he got to high school. While playing basketball in high school, Butler was invited to play video games from a teammate Jordan Leslie. His mother, Michelle Lambert, took him in. Butler finally found a place to stay. Michelle Lambert helped his growth and made him promise that he would go to college and make something of his life.

Jimmy started taking basketball more seriously and doubled his scoring average in his senior year of high school. Even though he worked hard, he was only the 73rd best player in the state of Texas.

With no big colleges offering Jimmy started his college career at Tyler Junior College.

After a big season Butler got the attention of then-Marquette coach Buzz Williams. The coaches noticed how hard Jimmy was working in comparison to the other players and gave him an offer to play at Marquette. He faxed his letter of intent inside of a McDonalds.

Buzz Williams became a father-figure for Jimmy. He pushed him to be great. His stats were average, but he out-worked everyone and pushed himself to new heights.

In his senior season, Butler played with future Miami Heat teammate Jae Crowder. Both players averaged double figures in scoring for the season leading the Golden Eagles to the Sweet 16.

The Chicago Bulls took a chance on Jimmy with the last pick of the first round in the 2011 NBA Draft. Every year Butler got better.

The thing about Jimmy Butler that sets himself apart from other players is he's always working. The summer prior to Jimmy Butler winning "Most Improved Player" in the 2014-2015 season, Butler went off the grid. No T.V. No internet, just Butler and his friends hooping in his hometown in Houston, Texas.

The offseason is how Butler bridged the gap to becoming one of the top two-way players in the NBA. Every day he gets up at 5:30 AM, and hits the courts, usually up to three times a day, then does strength and conditioning.

As of the last couple of years, rumors circulated that Butler was labeled as a bad teammate. Him speaking his mind and being honest has led to bad, and heated conversations with teammates. When he signed with the Miami Heat in the 2019 offseason, critiques were

skeptical. Does he have what it takes to lead a team? Can he command a locker room and take this team to new heights?

It's truly not about stats for Butler. It's about winning. He simply wants it more. And he got the entire Heat organization to buy in from day 1. He's been a leader for the young guys that have been huge for the Miami Heat this season, like Tyler Herro.



"I just wanted to do this for Jimmy. People might label him as a bad teammate for what he has done in the past but he's a tremendous leader for us every night. He lays it all out there and there is no other guy that we would want to lead. He's a leader in the locker room, on the court, off of the court. With him leading, I feel like we're in good hands."

Jimmy has found a group of guys that want to win just as bad as he does. And he's lead this group to the NBA's biggest stage.

He's been doubted his entire life. Very few people expected him to get past Giannis Antetokounmpo and Milwaukee. When he dispatched the Bucks in 5, people still doubted him against Boston and their athleticism. After beating the Celtics last night in 6, he goes up against the King. LeBron James, who once upon a time suited up for the Heat and delivered 2 championships for the franchise.

The Los Angeles Lakers are heavy favorites. But from Jimmy Butler's perspective, he wouldn't want to have it any other way.