

# Tamika Catchings: 'Accept Your Differences'

BY//MELODY K. HOFFMAN

W NBA star Tamika Catchings says her parents noticed her moderate hearing loss when she was only 3. Catchings began wearing hearing aids when she started school but says it was difficult because she wanted to "fit in."

Today, through her Catch The Stars Foundation, Catchings, a forward with the Indiana Fever, works with underprivileged youth, some of whom have disabilities. She shares her struggles with children who are going through the same experiences.

"When I was in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, I was just so frustrated from getting made fun of all of the

time, people talking about the way I talked or about my hearing aids, that one day on my way home from school ... I took my hearing aids out and threw them in a field of grass," Catchings remembers. "I needed to be normal for a little while."

Catchings, who finished high school in Texas, said she learned how to read lips and had to work much harder to get through school. "The first thing I did was move from the back of the class to front of the class and [I] wanted to make sure I didn't miss anything."

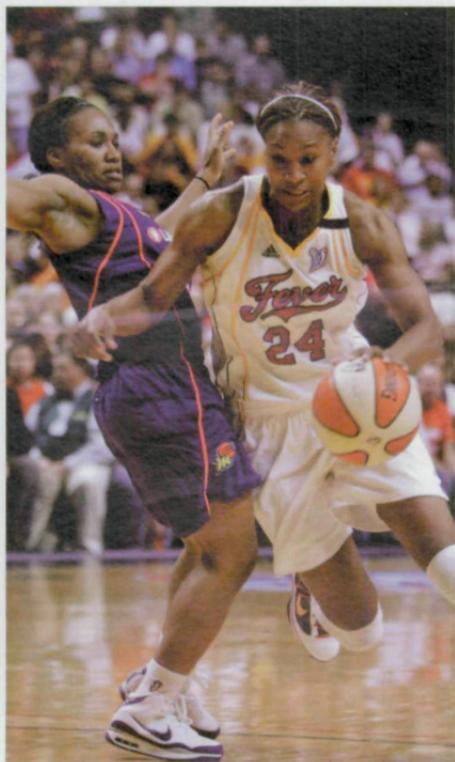
She began to develop a love for sports and started playing soccer and basketball. She and her brother and sisters learned from their father, Harvey Catchings, an 11-year NBA player.

"I really started playing sports because it was an outlet for me and it was something that I was good at," says Tamika Catchings, who was an All-American basketball player in high school and college.

In 1997, during her first season at the University of Tennessee, Catchings said coach Pat Summitt learned of her impairment and encouraged her to resume wearing her aids so she could accomplish "great things." Catchings has been wearing her hearing aids on and off the court ever since.

"You will be able to accept your differences and one day you may be that example for another young child ... that wants to be like you."//

Indiana Fever star Tamika Catchings is averaging 17 points and 4 assists this season.



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