The emergence of Cameron Young '18 as a star on Quinnipiac's basketball team is a testament to the difference sports can make in a kid's life.

Growing up in Compton, California—one of the toughest addresses in Los Angeles County—Young was just 11 years old when his grandmother and cousin were murdered in 2007. The pain was sharp, but it never distracted him. The hope of basketball came a few years later when Young found his way to Westchester High School in LA, and ultimately, Quinnipiac.

A 6-foot-6 guard, Young led the Bobcats last year as a senior, averaging 18.8 points and 6.8 rebounds. He started all 33 games and set a school scoring record for a Division I season with 622 points. The performance was a stark contrast to Young's junior season at Quinnipiac, when he watched his Division I dream from the bench as a junior college transfer. He played in just six games in 2016-17, the fewest of any team member. Young sat out the rest of the season because of coaching decisions and a crowded roster, not because of any injury.

“It was hard for me, but I had a lot of support from teammates and my family,” Young said after a recent workout on Lender Court at People’s United Center. “I just kept working hard in practice and never gave up.”

Given his limited minutes as a junior, Quinnipiac officials petitioned the NCAA last spring for a fifth year of eligibility for Young, who earned his bachelor’s degree in psychology in May. After reviewing the case, the NCAA granted the waiver for Young, who will suit up this season as the top returning scorer in the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference.

“When Cam’s playing his best,” Quinnipiac coach Baker Dunleavy said, “he’s right up there with anybody we play.”

The NCAA’s decision gives Young the chance to work on his game—he hopes to play professionally after college—and to get started on his master’s degree in social work, the family business back home.

Both of Young’s parents are social workers in LA, so he grew up hearing stories about the kids whose parents were chasing their next fix, or struggling to keep food on the table and eviction notices off the door. Young never forgot those cautionary tales. “My parents tried to lead kids the right way and give them the guidance they didn’t get from their own parents,” he said.

No matter how disappointed Young was about sitting on the bench at Quinnipiac, he understood it was nothing compared to the violence he knew in LA—the bullets and blades that could have taken him, too.

In 2007, Young shared a home in Compton with his mother, brother and grandmother, Ella Suggs. Suggs was stabbed that spring during a botched robbery as she waited for a city bus. Three months later, grief struck again when his cousin, Carl Young, was killed in what police called a gang-related shooting.

“Being a kid, I didn’t know what was going on in the real world. I didn’t know how serious life was,” Young said. “Losing my grandmother and cousin in the same year was tough. I began to appreciate life a lot more.”

When Dunleavy arrived in March 2017 as Quinnipiac’s new coach, everyone started fresh—perhaps no one more than Young. “Cam’s been through a lot of adversity, and it’s shaped who he is,” Dunleavy said. “When you unlock him and you get to know him better, you see how bright he is, and how much he listens and thinks about things.”

Young could have transferred to a basketball program with a higher profile, perhaps a Big East school or a Pac-12 school. But that was never the plan.

“I really like the environment here—the school, the coaches, my teammates,” Young said. “I wanted to stay here and be around people I know and I’m comfortable with.”

One of those people, Young said, is professor emeritus Larry Levine. “Last year, my favorite class was Professor Levine’s social psychology class. He did a really good job applying concepts from the book to real-life situations.”

Young, long a student of real-life situations, earned a B-plus in the class and an A on the court.