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WASHINGTON WIZARDS 2025-26





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In this year's Center Court, we are peeling back the curtain, providing a deeper look at the players who make this a team worth rooting for.

Dear Wizards Fans,

It's been an eventful season of building for the Wizards and our community.

On the court, we've seen promising growth under the direction of President Michael Winger, General Manager Will Dawkins, and Head Coach Brian Keefe. They are constructing a team and culture designed to sustain for years to come. The approach is thoughtful and strategic, developmentally focused, and implemented with the whole player in mind.

Michael and Will like to say they draft people, not players, and we've seen that prominently on display with this Wizards team. It's a group that shows up supportive of each other, learning from the veteran experience of Khris Middleton, while appreciating the talent of emerging stars like Alex Sarr, Bilal Coulibaly, Kyshawn George, Tre Johnson, and Bub Carrington, just to name a few. This is a roster rich in talent and character.

In this year's Center Court, we are peeling back the curtain, providing a deeper look at the players who make this a team worth rooting for. You'll see their personalities, learn their backstories, understand their approaches to the game, and get a behind-the-scenes look at their new, state-of-the-art locker room.

Just before the start of this 2025-26 campaign, we unveiled phase one of renovations at Capital One Arena. Players entered their new spaces with enthusiasm, marveling at the amenities that will help them show up as the best versions of themselves on and off the court.

We are honored to build a team and culture the community can be proud of, and we are so grateful for your commitment to the Wizards. You, our fans, are the lifeblood of our franchise.

The future is bright.

Sincerely,



ON THE COVER
Bub Carrington, Bilal Coulibaly,
Kyshawn George, Tre Johnson,
Alex Sarr, Will Riley

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
Adedayo "Dayo" Kosoko



2025-26 CENTER COURT MAGAZINE
WENT TO PRINT ON JAN. 27 AND REFLECTS
THE WIZARDS ROSTER ON THAT DATE.

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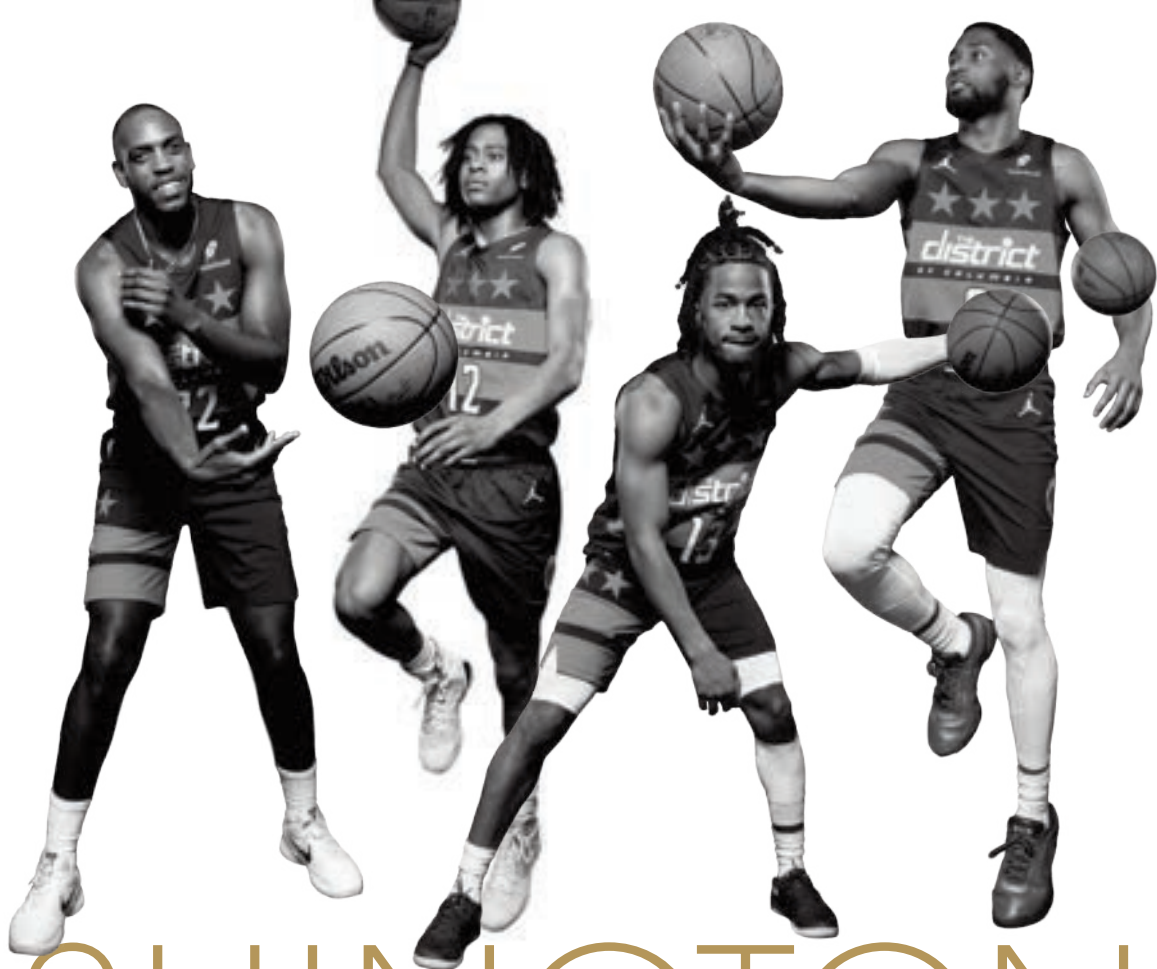
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2026



WASHINGTON





WIZARDS





Favorite Uniform

Every Wizard has pride repping the District on the court, but navy and this season's gold City Edition jersey top their list. The Wizards debuted their new Encore City Edition uniform earlier this season, which pays homage to the iconic gold alternate uniforms worn by the Wizards teams from 2006-2009, reimagined with a new configuration from the 2021 Mixtape chassis.



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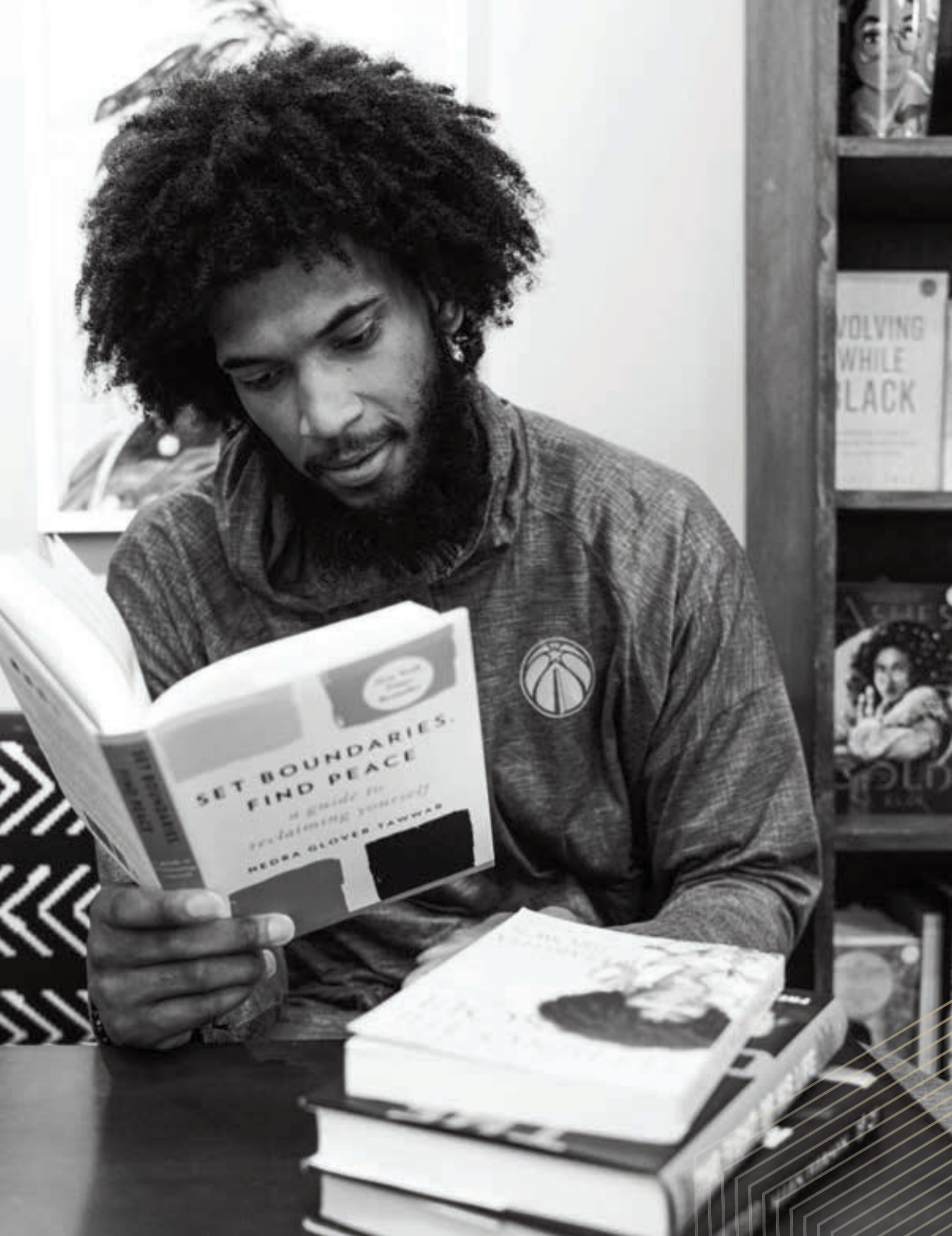


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photographed by

MIA BUTLER

SHOT AT WIZARDS
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MAHOGANYBOOKS

At what age did you get into reading? Was there a book that made you fall in love with it? I didn't get into reading until a couple years ago, around 24 or 25. Once I started, I realized how much it was helping me in my life. I enjoy learning new things, applying what I read, and just growing overall. It felt helpful, so I stuck with it, and I've been reading a lot ever since.

What's your all-time favorite book, and why? Do you have a favorite author? Right now, my favorite book is *The Let Them Theory* by Mel Robbins. I'm reading it now, and I love how practical and relatable it is. Another one I really love is *Becoming Supernatural: How Common People are Doing the Uncommon* by Dr. Joe Dispenza. It's about the power of the mind, creating your own reality, and how meditation and awareness can change your life. It reminded me how much potential is overlooked

MARVIN
BAGLEY III



because of distractions, like always being on our phones. I also loved that one.

I don't think I have a favorite author. I'm drawn to books that speak to me in the moment, regardless of the author. I just like books that can help.

Do you have a favorite genre?

Are there any genres you dislike? My favorite genre is self-growth. That's my go-to. I also like music-related books, since that's another passion of mine. Anything that helps me learn or become a better person always draws my interest.

I wouldn't say I dislike any genres. I just haven't explored many others yet.

What attracts you to a book? Is it the cover,

recommendations, or something else? I think both.

When I hear people talk about a book, I naturally get curious about why they love it, so I look into it and try to figure out what is attracting people's interest.

Covers catch my attention, too. Whether it's the title, the colors, or the design. If it draws me in, I'll pick it up and flip through it. If I like it, I'll take it home and start to read it. So, it's a mix of reviews and presentation.

Is there a book you think everyone should read at least once? Why?

I think, *The Let Them Theory*, is a book everyone should read. It teaches you to focus on what you can control and to let people be who they are even when it's frustrating or challenging. There

are people in the world who may do things that you don't agree with or do things that you don't like or that irritate you, and the book teaches you how to focus on you, and let them do what they do. It helps you have healthier conversations and not carry things that aren't yours to carry. I would recommend the book, 10 /10.

Do you prefer reading in the morning, at night, or whenever you have free time? Do you have a place you typically

read? I read whenever I have time. We travel and practice so much, so I read before bed, I read on the flights, and after games. Anytime there's a window of time, I usually pull out the book I'm reading and read until I get tired.

My favorite place to read is in my room before bed. I'll read throughout the day, but my favorite time is when I'm about to go to bed and I'm settling down. It calms my mind, especially if I'm reading a book that I can learn from. That's the last thing I want on my mind so I'm able to process it.

Do you prefer physical books or digital books? Do you write in the margins?

I actually like doing both at the same time. If I buy a book, I like to get the audiobook too so I can read it while hearing the author or narrator. It helps me connect with the material better than just reading it in my own head. Some books don't have audio, so I read those on their own, but when I can do both, that's my preference. I like to visualize the book and what I'm actually reading more than just reading the book in my own voice, in my own head.

Yes, I definitely write in the margins. I highlight, underline, circle things or bracket paragraphs. But I like to take notes so when I reread a book, I can remember what stood out to me the first time. It keeps the information from just going in one ear and out the other.



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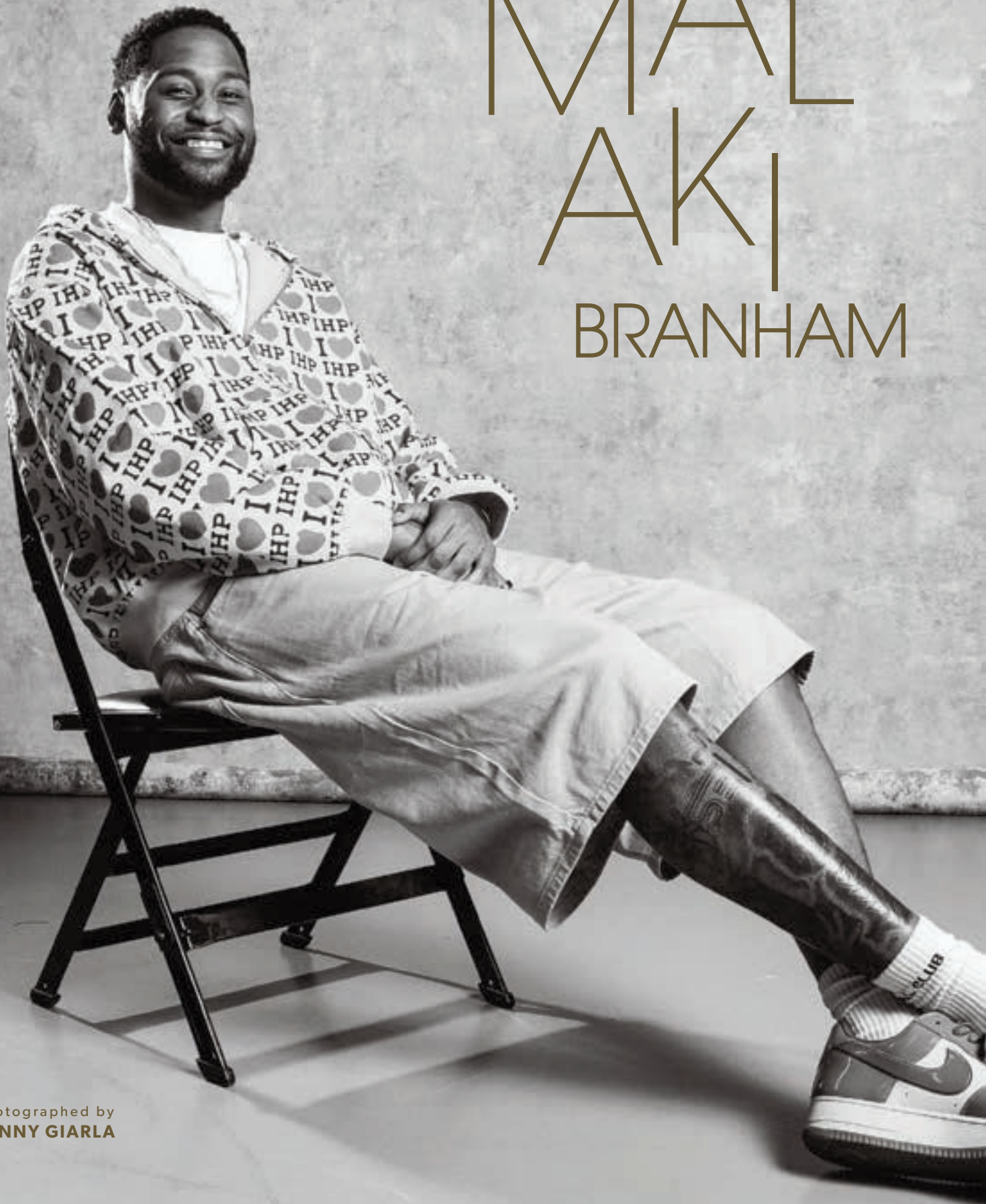
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MAL AKI BRANHAM



photographed by
KENNY GIARLA



How did you first get into sneakers and fashion? I got into sneakers because of my uncle. I really started getting into fashion during my rookie year. I'd see Russell Westbrook and Allen Iverson's fits, and it just became something I really enjoyed.

As a child, do you remember your favorite pair of sneakers you owned? Yes, my favorites were the Space Jams. My mom got them for me for Christmas when I was probably 13 or 14.

How do you describe your style? Who or what influences it the most? I feel like my style is unique because I can do streetwear, or I can switch it up and go more business casual. That versatility is what makes it unique. The people who influence me the most are Allen Iverson and Russell Westbrook.

How do you plan your game day fits? I talk to my stylist, and we plan things out before games, so I already know what I'm wearing. That's pretty much how we do it.

What are some of your favorite sneakers? How many pairs do you own? If you combine lifestyle and basketball sneakers, I honestly have no idea. I just know I have a lot of basketball sneakers. As far as favorite sneakers to wear, I'd probably say my Travis Scotts.

How do you think sneaker culture has evolved over the years? It's changed a lot. So many shoes are coming back into style, which is great. It feels like a rerun in a good way, everything is coming back in style. More shoes, more events, and more energy around it all.

What's your all-time favorite lifestyle sneaker? I'd probably say my Travis Scotts.

What's a sneaker you don't own but would love to? Honestly, I think I have everything I want.

Favorite basketball sneaker? Either the KD4s or Kyrie 1s.

MALAKI BRANHAM



RAPID FIRE

High-tops or low-tops?

Low tops

Go-to everyday sneaker?

Travis Scotts

Clean and simple or loud and bold? Clean and simple

What's your favorite colorway? A simple color – it could be black. Something with a normal base

What's your dream sneaker collab? Travis Scott

What's one sneaker everyone should own? Nike Vomero

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How did you get into playing ping-pong? At what age did you start? I got into ping-pong around age 14. I had a teacher in ninth grade who kept a ping-pong table in her classroom, and she let my friends and me play every day. That's really where it all started.

How often do you usually play? These days I play whenever I see a table, so probably once every couple of months.

What do you enjoy the most about playing ping-pong? I enjoy being good at it. It's a rewarding and competitive sport, and you really get to see the results of the work you put in.

Which teammate do you think would give you the most competition? I'd say Kyshawn [George] would give me a little bit of competition.

What's your playing style? Do you find yourself more on the attack, defense, or a mix? Definitely a mix of both. I'm the type of player who reads my opponents and adjusts.

Do you use any spin techniques or other strategies? Oh yes, obviously I use a lot of spin. That's one of the main reasons I got into ping-pong. I also try to get in my opponent's head a little bit, too.

Who is the toughest opponent you've ever faced? My friend in high school. We learned the game together and played every day, so we were always at the same level of competition.

What are some of your other favorite off-court hobbies? I've gotten into gaming, I like building Legos, and I'm starting to get into fashion.

What's something you've watched or read lately that you'd recommend? Watch all the Marvel movies in order.

Is there a hobby you've always wanted to pick up? Pool. Pool is next on my list.

BUB CARRINGTON





photographed by
KENNY GIARLA

SHOT AT SPIN,
WASHINGTON DC





PAJAMA Q&A

This season the team is giving away a pair of pajama pants you designed. Tell us a little bit about the design process?

The design process was fun.

This summer I was in the lab designing and putting it all together. I came up with something I think the fans will really like.

The design has stars, "Washington" with one of the Wizards logos, and my number on it.

How long have you been a pajama pants enthusiast? I've been a real enthusiast for about three or four years now, but I've always loved pajama pants.

How many pairs of pajama pants do you own? Right now, I own 46 pairs – I recently counted.

What are some of your favorite pairs? I love my Snoopy pajamas, and of course I really like the Wizards pair I designed.

What's your go-to pajama pants style? They have to have pockets. I don't care much about the material, as long as they look good and have pockets, I'm happy.

Do you prefer fun patterns or solid colors? I prefer something fun and something a little different.

JUS
TIN
CHAMPAGNIE



photographed by
KENNY GIARLA

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When did you get into gaming, and what was the first video game you ever played?

I'd say I was about 10 when I played my first arcade game, but my first video game was even earlier. I was around 7, and the first game I ever played was Wii Sports.

What was the first arcade game you played? Pac-Man was the first arcade game I ever played. I was decent at it. I used to go to my aunt's house, she had a little machine. I would play

all the time. I was alright, but she used to beat me.

Was there a particular game that made you fall in love with gaming? I'd have to say Pac-Man. That was the game I started with when I was young, and from there I just made my way into playing everything else.

What are some of your favorite games to play? Anyone you like to play against? Call of Duty is my favorite right now. I play against my brothers a lot.

JUSTIN CHAMPAGNIE



We will FaceTime and then hop on the game.

Is there a game you think is overrated? What's your favorite game of all time and why? I think NBA2K is the most overrated video game. My favorite video game of all time is Super Mario Bros. Also, Skee-Ball and air hockey are great arcade games.

What's your favorite genre? If it's not sports, I would say warfare. Whatever you'd call the category that Call of Duty falls into.

What's your favorite console to play on? PS5.

How often do you game each week? About three to four times a week.

You played pool a bit growing up, what age were you introduced to it? I want to say I was around 12 or 13. I was a little older. My dad used to make me play with him, and I would lose, but I got better. Now I think I'd take the crown.

Which teammate do you think would give you the most competition? I'd say one

of the vets. They might have some experience in pool. The rest of them, like Bub [Carrington], stand no chance.



GLEN POWELL

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WELCOME TO THE *League Moment*

Marvin Bagley III

Playing against the Warriors my rookie year. We faced them in preseason, and they had Kevin Durant, Steph Curry, Klay Thompson – all the guys that I grew up watching. They destroyed us. That was the first time I was shocked at how well a team could play together. I'd say it was a good moment for me to soak everything in and experience the league.

Malaki Branham

Seeing Kevin Durant (KD) for the first time. KD was my favorite player coming into the league, so seeing him in person was surreal.

Bub Carrington

Jericho Sims set a really hard screen on me.

Sharife Cooper

My first training camp, guarding Trae Young.

Bilal Coulibaly

When we played New Orleans and Brandon Ingram dropped 40.

Khris Middleton

Getting scored on five times in a row by Jerry Stackhouse.

Will Riley

I wouldn't really say I've had one yet, but just watching how the guys move is very impressive.

Alex Sarr

Getting used to the rhythm of the games and having so many back-to-back games.

Tristan Vukcevic

My first start against the Lakers. I had to guard Anthony Davis (AD), and I stepped on the court and I saw LeBron [James] and AD, I thought, 'Wow, I'm actually in the NBA.' That's when it really hit me.



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A black and white photograph of John Wall, a professional basketball player, looking down at his smartphone. He is wearing a dark, textured suit jacket over a white shirt. He has a visible tattoo on his neck and is wearing a small earring. The background is a wooden wall with vertical slats. In the top right corner, there are several thin, parallel, diagonal lines. The text is overlaid on the bottom left of the image.

*After recently retiring,
JOHN WALL looks
back on his most
memorable moments
in Washington and
shares how he maintains
his connection to
basketball off the court*

photographed by **MIA BUTLER**

JOHN WALL



JOHN WALL

When you look back on your time with the Wizards, what moments stand out the most to you? A few of my favorite moments were, being drafted No. 1 and my welcome to D.C. All my moments and memories with Miyah [Telemaque-Nelson] stand out, as well as my first playoff series, particularly Game 5 in Chicago. Also, Game 6 in Atlanta and Game 6 versus Boston during the 2016-17 season.

Is there a particular game or play that you'll never forget?
Both Game 6s in Boston and Atlanta during the 2016-17 playoffs.

What are some of your proudest accomplishments throughout your career? Which teammates or coaches had the biggest impact on you, both on and off the court? Some of my proudest accomplishments include breaking the all-time assist and steal records in franchise history, being named a five-time NBA All-Star, making the All-NBA

Third Team and making the All-Defensive Second Team.

Some of the people who had the biggest impact on me include Sam Cassell, Brad Beal, Trevor Ariza, Coach [Scott] Brooks, and Coach [Randy] Whitman.

In recent years, you've stepped into the world of broadcasting and most recently joined Monumental Sports Network. Was broadcasting something you always envisioned doing after your playing career? No, never thought about broadcasting. I imagined front office work, being a GM and getting into more business ventures. Broadcasting came from what I thought would be a one-time opportunity to sit in with the broadcast team during a session at the NBA's G League Showcase. It's no secret that I love the game, watching it and talking about it. From there, NBA TV reached out, and I was able to get into a studio and learn more.





“This city and community embraced me with open arms and believed in me like no other, something I will never take for granted.”

If you could give one piece of advice to current players or young athletes, what would it be? Don't cheat yourself or the game. Lock in, don't take shortcuts, and always stay true to yourself. Keep working – adversity will happen, but don't quit!

You and your foundation were very active in the D.C. community. Why was giving back so important to you? My mom instilled in me early on that being a blessing to others is the most important thing you can do. It's not just about basketball, it's about leaving an impact everywhere you go.

The Wizards will be recognizing your impact on this franchise and the D.C. community later this season. What does that mean to you? It means everything to me. This city and community embraced me with open arms and believed in me like no other, something I will never take for granted. To be someone they continue to cheer for and root for is dope. It feels genuine and authentic. I always say, and mean it, D.C. is my second home. It's my city, and I will always be grateful for the love I receive. It means everything that what I gave on the court, and to this city, is being recognized, and I'm humbled by that.





SHA COOPER RIFE

photographed by
KENNY GIARLA



When did you start playing basketball? Who introduced you to the sport? I started playing when I was young, and my dad introduced me to the sport.

Who is the most influential person in your life? My dad.

Do you have any pregame rituals? Pregame meal? Pregame hype song?

Pregame Rituals: I always pray.

Pregame Meal: Pasta.

Hype Song: Right now, it is "Vulture Island" by Rob49.

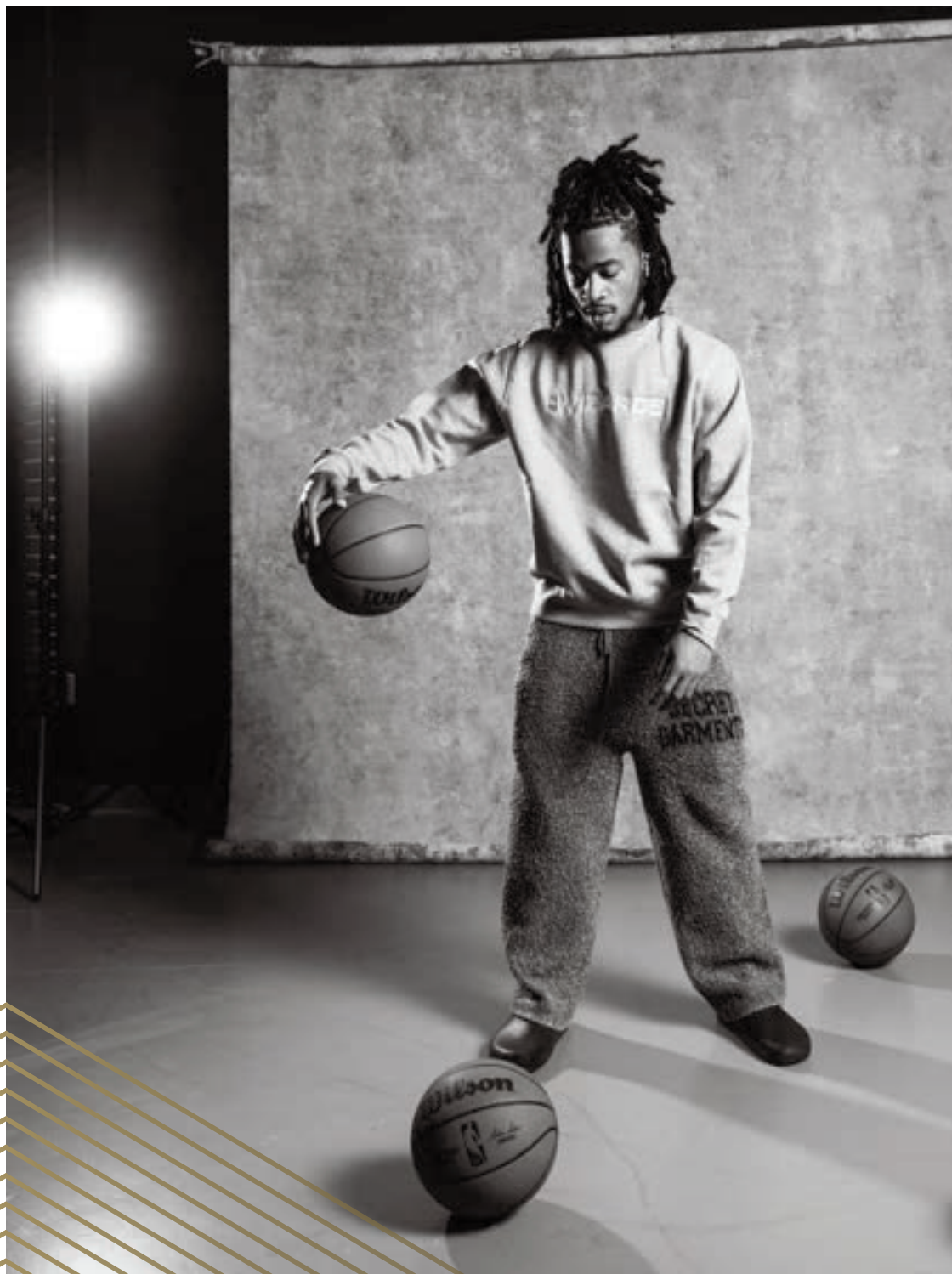
What does your game day routine typically look like? Nap, workout, lift, treatment, chapel, game.

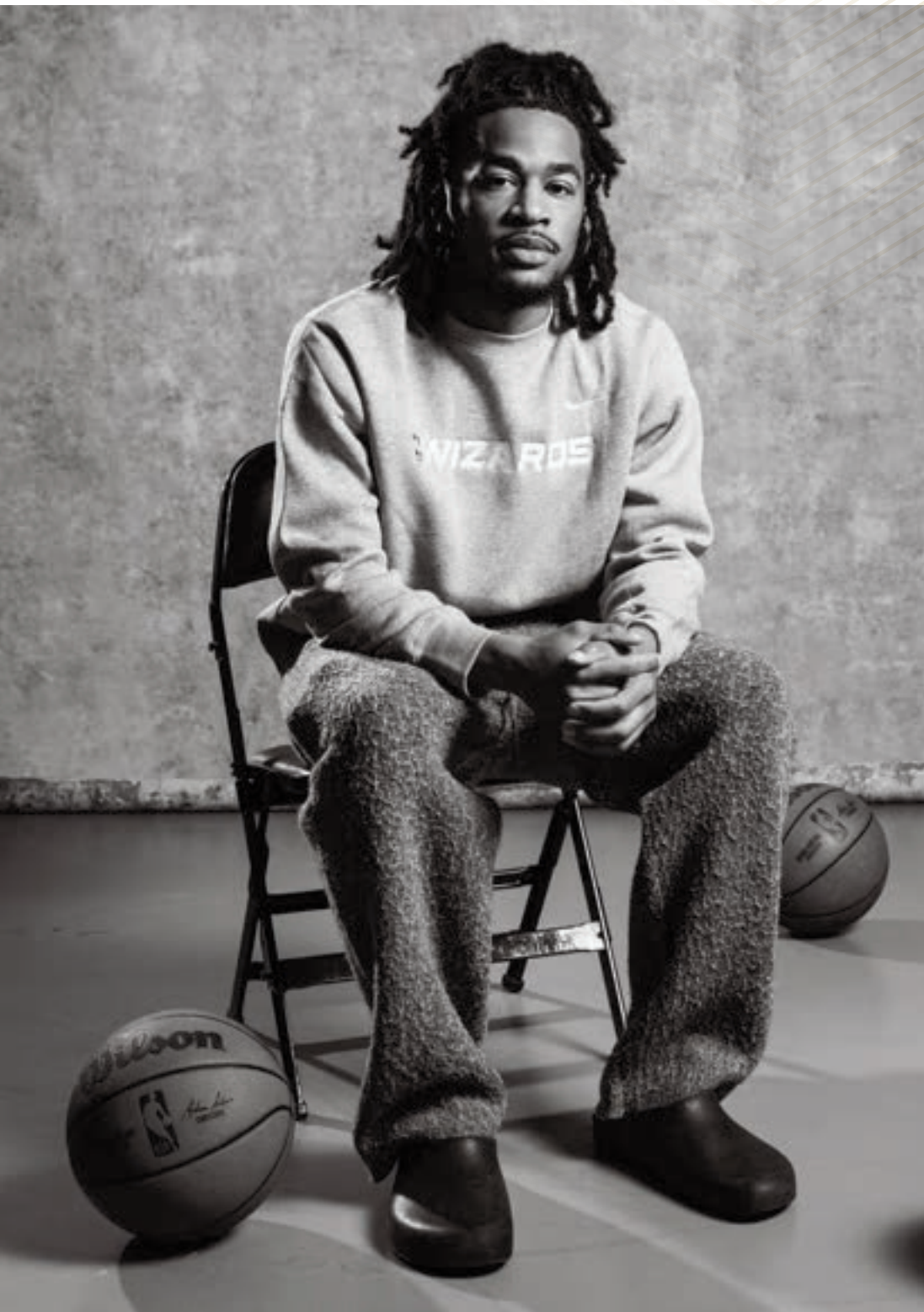
If you could play basketball with any famous athlete, living or dead, who would it be? Kobe Bryant.

What's the best piece of advice you've been given? "Never lose until you quit."

What are a few things you always bring on the road with you? My iPad.

What do you enjoy doing in your free time? What are some of your hobbies? I enjoy spending time with my family and playing games.





RAPID FIRE

Favorite place to vacation:
Greece

Favorite food: Pasta

Favorite musical artist:
Rod Wave

Favorite TV show/movie:
Power

Pet peeve? People eating with
stuff all over their face

Most used app in your phone?
TikTok

Favorite color? Black

Dream/favorite car? Ferrari

Do you have a lucky number?
2

Early bird or night owl?
Night owl

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BILAL COULIBALY

Have you always been into art? What inspired you to take up art? Not always. I'd say

I started when I was around 11 years old. What inspired me to pick up art is that I like to see nice things, and I like to create nice things too. Being able to express myself and show my natural talents is something I really love.

Do you remember the first piece you ever created?

Probably just some drawings. I used to like drawing people, so it was likely my mom, my sisters, or someone close to me.



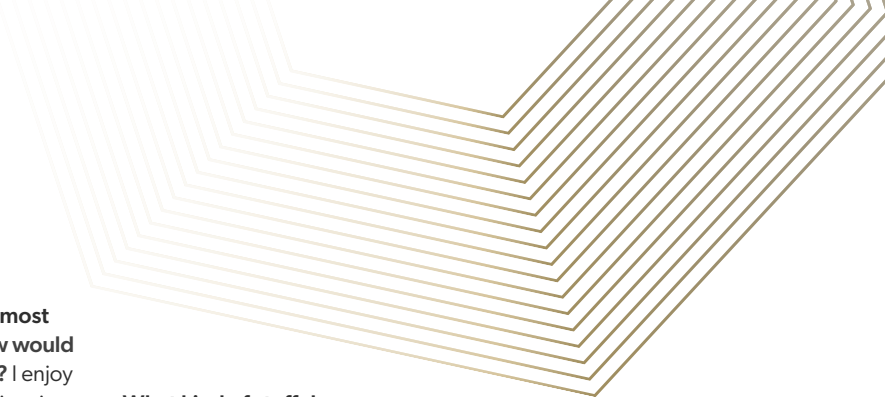


photographed by
ADEDAYO "DAYO" KOSOKO

BILAL IS PHOTOGRAPHED WITH
DMV-BASED ARTIST CHARLES JEAN-PIERRE

BILAL COULIBALY





What do you enjoy the most about creating art? How would you describe your style? I enjoy not thinking about anything, just focusing on the art and getting my mind off everything else. I'd describe my style as more abstract. I like to create whatever comes to mind in the moment.

What kind of stuff do you usually like to draw or paint? Honestly, whatever comes to me. Like I said, it's very abstract. It's usually just a mix of colors, that's the main thing.

Do you doodle or draw/paint when you're in the mood? No, I usually book appointments at the studio or store, so I already know what I'm about to paint.



BILAL COULIBALY



Do you put on music when you draw or paint? If so, what type of music? Yeah, definitely. Mostly R&B, depending on what I'm painting.

Are you working on anything right now? I just finished something that's currently at the store. Once it's done, I'll probably show it. It's a ceramic.

Do you own any art? Not yet, but I'm looking forward to building a collection.





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Favorite Sport to Watch

hockey

Kyshawn George

baseball

Khris Middleton

tennis

Marvin Bagley III
Malaki Branham
Anthony Gill
Tristan Vukcevic



high jump

Will Riley

WNBA basketball

Tre Johnson

football

Bub Carrington
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Sharife Cooper
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soccer

Bilal Coulibaly
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For Wizards players, being active in the community is more than an act of service, it's a commitment to connection, purpose, and impact

BY BECKETT HARRISON

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY WASHINGTON WIZARDS

Wizards in the Community



"It means a lot to me.
A lot of people gave back
to me when I was younger,
so this feels like a full-circle
moment. I feel obligated
to give back because now
I can, I have the resources.
So I feel like I have to
use them to help others."
- BUB CARRINGTON





NBA players love to be seen on the court, but in the DMV, Washington Wizards players pride themselves on being seen in the community.

Community outreach is a backbone of player involvement, and it's an initiative that starts as soon as a player becomes part of the Wizards organization. It's not just about service, either: It's about love and reciprocation.

Dr. Rahman Anjorin, Monumental Basketball Director of Player Pathways and Enrichment, emphasized that players want to return the embrace that they feel from the fans.

"The D.C. community itself is one that wraps its arms around the team," Anjorin says. "There's no better feeling than going out to certain events and seeing the people who cheer you on, but now you're showing up for them in the same way that they showed up for you."

Many of the players see themselves reflected in the diversity of the DMV community, naturally gravitating toward causes they feel strongly about. One of Anjorin's responsibilities is to match players with outreach groups that may share a personal connection.

"We get to know the players individually and understand what their passions and interests are. Some are going to be neurodiverse, and are going to want to support neurodiverse entities. Some are going to want to work primarily with the homeless. Some are going to want to work with foster care, or civic engagement."

By encouraging player autonomy in choosing relatable initiatives, many players end up asking to go back to a group or a cause that they've helped in the past. Not only do they share internal connections with the lives of those they are serving, but they also build real relationships with members of the community who look up to them. Blooming those relationships over numerous cycles of interaction is key to meaningful community engagement.

For players, coaches, staff, and everyone with Monumental Basketball, service is a way to give back to the hundreds of thousands of people across the region who show up for each other day in and day out. Seeing players in the community, whether they're from the Wizards, Washington Mystics, or Capital City Go-Go, is a reminder that D.C.'s athletes play for the people and for the city, not just for a name on a jersey.



"I'm from here, so I was one of those kids who, when a special basketball player came through, like Rudy Gay for example, I wanted a free basketball or tickets to a game, just to get some advice. I always wanted to learn from the best. Now I just want to do the same thing for the next generation. It's all about seeing kids happy."

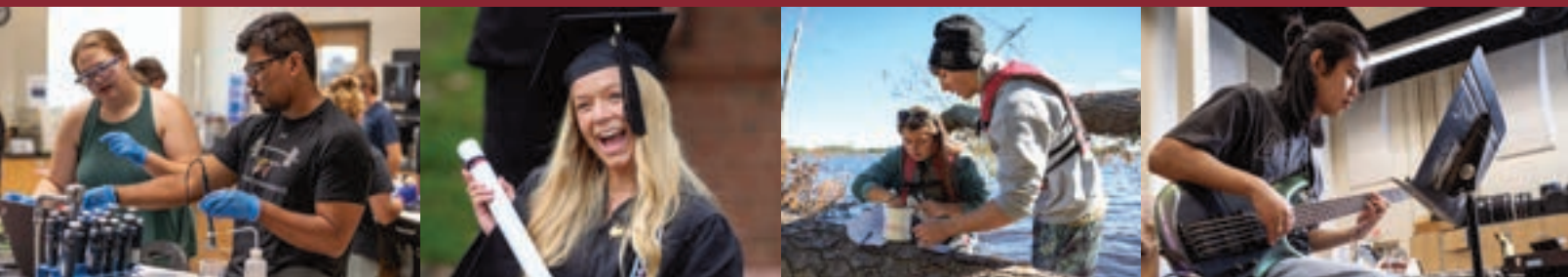
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BUILDING BONDS

Beyond the Court

EVERY SEASON, THE WASHINGTON WIZARDS proudly participate in and lead a wide range of initiatives designed to uplift, celebrate, and give back to the DMV community, whose unwavering support fuels the team both on and off the court. Recognizing the influential role of the organization and its players, the Wizards remain committed to creating meaningful connections and a lasting impact throughout the District. Through service, celebration, and shared experiences, the team continues to recognize the community it proudly represents.



HOMETOWN HEROES

In honor of the brave individuals who selflessly serve and protect the community every day, the entire Washington Wizards team, alongside staff and alumni, hosted their annual Hometown Heroes Lunch on Sept. 11. This season, the team visited Washington D.C. Fire & EMS Engine Company 13 (Truck Company 10) and Metropolitan Police Department 7th District, partnering with local Black-owned DMV business Food on the Stove to serve lunch to 250 first responders and personally thank them for their dedication and sacrifice.



A NIGHT OF BLACK EXCELLENCE

In celebration of Black History Month, the Wizards hosted A Night of Black Excellence during the Feb. 3 game, honoring the contributions of past and present Black pioneers within the NBA and across various industries. The evening spotlighted excellence in the industries of music and art, sports and education, and culinary arts, offering fans an engaging and educational experience that celebrates both historical influence and modern-day leaders.



HOOPS FOR TROOPS ALL-STAR CHALLENGE

To further express gratitude to those who have served our country, the Wizards hosted their annual Hoops for Troops All-Star Challenge on Jan. 23. In partnership with Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling, military personnel took part in an All-Star Weekend style skills challenge and game. Wizards alumni served as guest coaches, while the Wizards Dancers kept the crowd entertained.

As part of Monumental Sports & Entertainment's District of Play initiative, the Wizards also hosted a Jr. Wizards Youth Basketball Skills Clinic and Dance Clinic for children affiliated with Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling.

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KYS
HAWN
GEORGE



The emergence
of Kyshawn
George comes
with a powerful
work ethic
and newfound
confidence

by **MAYA JONES**

photographed by
ADEDAYO "DAYO" KOSOKO





KYSHAWN GEORGE WAKES UP ON GAME DAYS AND HEADS TO THE COURT.

Alone, he practices his shots from every range, getting his body moving and warming up ahead of the scheduled shootaround with the rest of his team. He hits the gym for a bit, lifting until it's time for a quick meal and heading back home. In between practice and the game, George sneaks in a quick nap to rest his body before the excitement to come.

He heads back to the venue where he gets in a healthy meal in the new players' lounge at Capital One Arena, receives pre-game treatment, meets with his coaches and teammates, and gets ready to hit the court for introductions, playing his hardest in front of a home crowd.

It's a regimen George is now used to and one that helped elevate his game from his rookie season to now. The proof is in his statistics.

George's points per game shot from 8.7 to 14.7, a 68.97% increase from his rookie season. Now, through more than a quarter of games played this season, he has also improved his field goal percentage, three-point percentage, rebounds, and assists per game compared to his rookie year.

Wizards assistant coach TJ Sorrentine also noticed the difference in George's shooting, which started slowly last year until George became more comfortable on the court, finding his shooting rhythm and breaking into uncharted territory defensively.

"He started really impacting on both sides of the ball and it was like, man, this dude's got a chance to be really good," Sorrentine says. "So then we kind of took that into the spring. When we came back after the season, we really just came up with a plan, and he just dove in. He's an elite worker, and his habits are off the charts."



***He's an elite worker,
and his habits
are off the charts.***

— ASSISTANT COACH TJ SORRENTINE

One word Sorrentine uses to describe George is ambitious.

He noticed a new focus within George from last season to this season. George prioritized the weight room more, visiting sometimes two to three times per day. The stronger George became physically, the more he improved mentally. With those small differences came a large shift in his confidence, which Sorrentine believes made the biggest difference overall.

"When a guy is in the gym, that's always kind of a barometer for us as coaches," Sorrentine says. "I was like, 'OK, he's starting to get better

here.' They always say those dark hours or summer hours show up in the winter, and thankfully they're showing up for him. We have a long way to go, but definitely you can see the work and the time that he's put in for sure."

George is finding his footing and, outside of Wizards coaches and staff, fans and analysts have noticed the differences as well. George's game highlights can be found on nearly every social media platform accompanied by high praise of his performances from fans, and even former detractors turned fans. Articles written this season have more of



KYSHAWN GEORGE IS PICTURED AT HILLWOOD ESTATE, MUSEUM & GARDENS. Discover one of D.C.'s hidden gems, the former home of Marjorie Merriweather Post. Explore a grand mansion filled with treasures, stroll through lush gardens, and enjoy one of D.C.'s most enchanting spots.



an upbeat tone when it comes to George's contribution to the team.

Though George is finding himself and a formula that works on the professional level, there's one thing that still looms over him. The one thing that keeps him wanting to improve, work hard every day and continue to hone his skills.

Kyshawn George just wants to win.

"I'm not going to complain that I get attention, to be honest," George says. "I'm happy, but that's not what I'm really focused on. I'm focused on what I could do every single day to be the best I could be individually and help my team get where it wants to be."

The team know its young, and it can take time to become a powerhouse, but for some, frustration builds quickly. For George, it's a new form of motivation. His personal goals include making the right plays, being aggressive in the paint, and creating advantages that will lead to better shots. George believes they try to focus mostly on what they can control as a team – not overcomplicating the game and making sure that things they can control are done consistently.

His sentiments haven't changed much since he started playing the game at a young age, and the experience he's gained on multiple

teams in multiple countries has helped navigate his game on a professional level.

George began playing basketball in Monthey, Switzerland, where he was born and raised. His father, Deon George, was a star player at Saint Francis University before heading overseas to play professionally for 12 years. It made sense for George to follow in his father's footsteps, especially with Deon coaching his son for the first 15 years.

George left Switzerland to attend Lycée Emiland Gauthey, a high school in Chalon-sur-Saône, France, before traveling to the United States. Here, George played a season at the University of Miami, where he started 16 of his 30 games played as a freshman. At each level, George learned something new about his game and strived to be better at every stop in his career.

"All the basics, I learned in Switzerland," George says. "When I got to France, it was about knowing how to manage school and practices. We used to do two-a-days before and after school, just the amount of work that needed to be put in to be able to become a pro.

When I got to Miami, it was more so about individual work, whereas they have an infrastructure that is the closest to the NBA. I was able to

take advantage of those infrastructures and people that were willing to work just to add to my game. And ultimately it showed on the curve.”

In 2024, George was drafted 24th overall by the New York Knicks but traded to the Wizards in a draft night trade. During that summer, the work truly began for George with Sorrentine, who left Brown University to join the Wizards the same year.

“When we first came across each other, it was pretty much right after the draft and we got right to Summer League and there was kind of an evaluation process for everybody,” Sorrentine says. “His unbelievable IQ was the first thing. This guy reads the game. He sees the game at a high level.

Second thing was just his strength,” Sorrentine continues. “He needed to put on some weight because I know the grind of the game and the physicality of the game, so I was concerned with that.





But then you get around him and start working with him and he's actually stronger than he looks. Obviously, he's really worked hard on his body, and he's gotten a ton stronger."

George takes the game seriously but also works on getting better mentally. He's always been his hardest critic in general. He appreciates the praise he gets, but it doesn't change how he feels on the inside. He has, however, become close to his teammates and uses them as resources when it comes to getting better on the court.

"I talked a lot to Khriston Middleton about footwork angles on the post ups, on the mid post, just how he operates, how he's able to get his shot off," George says. "Just really little details that make the difference at the end of the day." George mentions that former teammate, CJ McCollum, talked about the consistency of the work, "He always said, keep swimming regardless. You score 40, you score zero points, you win by 30, you lose by 30. You've got to make sure you have that baseline of work that you put in every single day."

One thing Sorrentine wants to highlight is George's understanding of the team's schematic approach, his defense and his improvement on offense.

"What people don't see is the pride he takes on that end and also being able to be very good on the offensive end," Sorrentine says. "It's hard to do both of those things at a consistent level and that's something that he prides himself on and that's a big deal. He can be one of the best defenders in this league at the end of the day when he gets more mature and keeps putting more time in. But I think

that's a big deal for him and for all of our coaches that he continues to grow on that side of the ball."

No matter how serious it gets on the court, George still has a fun-loving side that shows once you get to know him. He cracks his first smile of the interview when asked about his hobbies outside of basketball. A fond memory comes to mind as he thinks about playing ping-pong with his highly competitive family. He credits his father at winning the most, but it would always be a tie between him and his brother. Sorrentine has also witnessed glimpses of the side of George the public doesn't always get to see.

"He's actually a funny dude at times," Sorrentine says. "He is quiet, but when you get to know him, he's got a funny side to him. I love that about him because he is so serious with his work and with his life and everything is about structure. He's super regimented in everything that he does as far as his preparation. So sometimes the joking and the fun, enjoying life piece can get lost for a lot of people that structure their life that way. And for him, he actually has that side."

But near the end of the interview, George reverts back to the quiet, serious player that fans see most of the time. He ponders the last question for a second, then looks into the camera. The one thing he wants to accomplish in the next few years?

"I want to win. I want to start winning. I want to win a championship. I want to be the best player on the winning team, on the championship team. That's where I want to go."



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THE PHRASE “MAN’S BEST FRIEND” has long applied to the friendly, furry canines that become our pets, and NBA players are no exception. Marvin Bagley III has a dog named Ice, Alex (and brother Olivier) Sarr are the proud owner to a Doberman named Koda, and Sharife Cooper has Pluto and Astro. So, what happens when you mix basketball and man’s best friend? You get one of the most unique game night experiences around.

As pets have become integral members of the family, the Wizards have leaned into making sure they’re included in the fun. For the second consecutive season, the Wizards will host Hoops & Hounds Night on Sunday, Feb. 22, welcoming fans and their four-legged companions to Capital One Arena (COA) for the Wizards vs. Charlotte Hornets game.

Last season, pups officially took over COA when the Wizards hosted nearly 140 dogs and their humans. The event made history as the first dog-friendly game hosted by an NBA team (with the Memphis Grizzlies’ G League affiliate, the Memphis Hustle, previously hosting a similar event), and quickly became a fan favorite. From wagging tails to slam dunks, the night proved that basketball is really better with dogs.

So how does an NBA team successfully host more than 100 dogs inside an NBA arena? Thoughtful and careful planning. The Wizards created dedicated lounge spaces on the 400 level, complete with relief stations featuring artificial grass, as well as open areas for dogs and their owners to relax and socialize. Dogs were also spaced throughout the arena bowl to ensure that everyone, both two-legged and four-legged alike, had plenty of room to enjoy the game comfortably.

This season, the Wizards will partner with the nonprofit organization, Brandywine Valley SPCA Washington, D.C., the largest animal welfare organization in the region. Dogs will be available for adoption during the event, and a portion of ticket proceeds will benefit the organization. To shine a spotlight on pups looking for their forever homes, Wizards players will even incorporate them into their walk-in arrivals, turning pregame fashion into an adoption showcase.

Fans who purchase tickets to Hoops & Hounds Night for the Wizards’ game on Feb. 22 will receive a G-Wiz mascot dog toy while supplies last. With basketball and canine companions all under one roof, Hoops & Hounds Night proves that Capital One Arena truly is a place where everyone can feel at home.



HOOPS & HOUNDS

WHERE BASKETBALL MEETS MAN’S BEST FRIEND



photographs by
RICH KESSLER



photographed by
KENNY GIARLA

SHOT AT BARRY FARM RECREATION
CENTER IN SOUTHEAST D.C.

ANTHONY GILL



What does community mean to you, and what motivates you to give back?

People motivate me to give back. I genuinely care about others, and I want the best for them. This community holds a very special place in my heart. It's a unique community built upon servanthood and serving the world as our nation's capital. Because of that, I feel an even stronger desire to give back and love this community.

Was being involved in the community something that started at a young age?

Was there a specific person who inspired you? Yes, it definitely started at a young age. My family and I grew up in the church, and we were always trying to serve however we could. I would say my parents inspired me the most.

What role do you think someone can have, large or small, in strengthening the communities they work and live in?

I think even the smallest actions can have a huge impact. For me, something as simple as smiling at someone can make a huge difference. You never know what someone is going through, and one smile can uplift and make a difference the entire day.



How do you believe sports can create positive change in communities? Sports are a connector. Many people relate to sports in some way, whether they played in elementary, middle, or high school, or even just grew up around it. Everybody can connect through sports. For us specifically, we have an amazing opportunity because we are fortunate and blessed to have a platform. If we use that platform the right way, we can uplift a lot of people.

Are there specific causes or issues that are important to you? I enjoy helping people and supporting others however I can.

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Capital One Arena Puts FANS FIRST

The sports and entertainment venue shows appreciation for fans through a series of upcoming changes to the building

BY MAYA JONES

ARENA RENDERINGS COURTESY OF
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It's a transformation that's about more than just sports – it's for everyone.

In a public-private partnership announced last October, Monumental Sports & Entertainment (MSE) founder and CEO Ted Leonsis teamed up with Washington, D.C., Mayor Muriel Bowser to make Capital One Arena the destination for an ultimate D.C. experience.

Most of the funds for the transformation, which total more than \$800 million, are being allocated to fan experience. With this new partnership, Bowser hopes that Capital One Arena offers more for fans while becoming an attraction for locals and visitors alike. The goal is for the arena to embody the spirit of D.C., displaying the beautiful artwork, welcoming personalities, and liveliness D.C. has to offer.

"The partnership with the mayor and the city of D.C. has been incredible," says Adam Gotts, MSE vice president of project and revenue management. "They saw the vision, and I think everything we're doing with the building has truly been incredible. It's just been an unbelievable public-private partnership for us from that standpoint."

The project has been in the works since March 2024, when MSE and Mayor Bowser signed an agreement to highlight the renova-

tions and commitment of funds. A month later, the D.C. council voted unanimously to invest \$515 million, while MSE's contributions totaled more than \$285 million. The plans include discussions that will bring high-tech functionality, a more comfortable environment for players, coaches, staff, and visiting teams, and continuity throughout every level of the arena. The full transformation is expected to be completed in 2027, right in time for the Wizards season.

But the partnership also shows how committed MSE and the city are to the growth of not only sports teams and events, but a dedication to the growth of D.C. as a whole.

The design inspiration focuses on three main areas: an improved experience for fans, world-class facilities for athletes, and expansion. For fans, there will be 65% more concession space, 30% more restrooms, new lounges and clubs for VIP fans, and various new food and beverage items. There are eight new suites – including the Founder Suites, Signature Suites, and Executive Suites – where attendees have VIP entrances, various parking options, a full concierge team, and



customized culinary options.

For the athletes, there have been renovations to locker rooms, the addition of state-of-the-art equipment, more spacious training areas, upgraded family and players' lounges, and a brand-new dining space. The project includes an additional 200,000 square feet, allowing for future spaces.

Capital One Arena averages around 200 events in the building a year, but future renovations could allow those numbers to increase by 50 to 100, helping the arena become a year-round destination, including sports, entertainment, and other events. According to Gotts, there has also been a demand for meeting spaces, which will be constructed.

"We're anticipating having over 30-plus brand-new spaces that can range from anywhere from 15 people to a banquet of 500-plus people that we'll be able to host in the building," Gotts says. "So our goal is to really not just program the building from a sports entertainment perspective, but make this a 365-day business and conference center. And that's something that we're in the process of building out now."

The project incorporates environment-friendly innovations, with a plan for carbon reduction that will limit unnecessary carbon output, stormwater management which will feature on-site water retention systems and pursuing a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification.

The exciting and highly anticipated new renovations provide an economic boost, creation of more jobs and an overall revitalization of the downtown D.C. area.

"Once we have the District Arts Collection fully completed throughout the building and all the memorabilia exhibits are up, we're looking to really build this into an attraction space in downtown D.C. where fans can come through and have access to all those spaces," Gotts says. "Having the ability to preview that to fans and show them not only what we're investing in from a fan-facing perspective, but how we're investing in our players and our teams to build that championship mindset, that's something that we want to open up and bring to the public over the next couple of years."



A JOHNSON



How would you describe your style? Do you have any fashion inspirations? Most of the time I'm more laid-back or chill, but I will also have days where I'm trying to be on a rockstar type of vibe. Then the next week I might just want to wear hoodies and sweats every day. It just depends on the day and my mood.

I don't have many fashion inspirations now, but when I was younger, I watched a lot of Michael Jackson and really paid attention to clothes early on.

Have you always been into fashion, or, is this something that has developed as you've aged? I have always been into fashion. It's been a thing for me from early on.

photographed by
KENNY GIARLA





What are some of your favorite brands? Where do you usually shop for your clothes? Some of my favorite brands are Balenciaga and Adidas. I shop a little bit everywhere: vintage stores, malls, resale stores. Anywhere I might find something unique.

How do you pick out your tunnel fits? Does it change at home versus on the road? I just go in my closet, see what I have, and put a fit together. It doesn't really change much whether I am at home or on the road. The only difference is checking what I packed and deciding if I need to grab anything else or just rock with what I brought.

What is your most-worn item in your closet? Definitely one of my hoodies, probably my black one.

Which teammate do you think has the best style? I like the way Will Riley dresses. I like Will's style.

What is your least favorite fashion trend? My least favorite trend is skinny jeans. I used to wear them when I was younger, but I can't really see myself wearing them anymore.

What item should everyone own? A hoodie and some sweats, you can never go wrong with those.

What is your go-to accessory? An AJ chain I got when I was in high school. That's definitely one of my go-tos.



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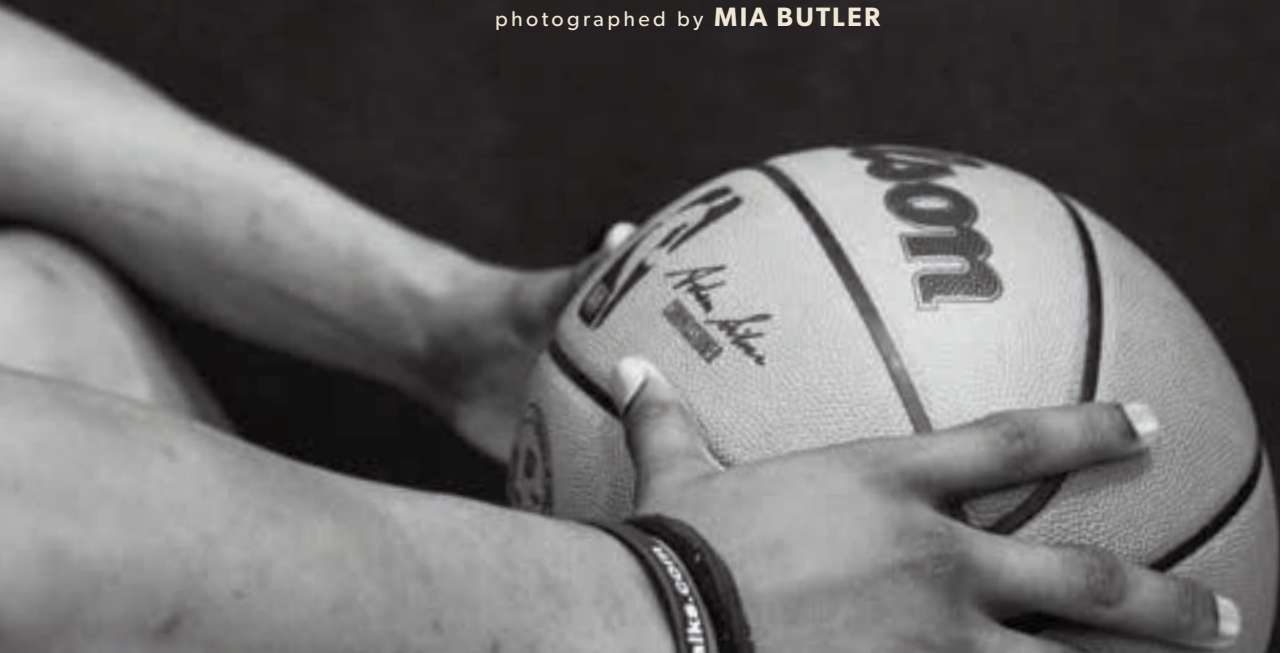


ALL
EYES
ON

TRE JOHNSON

Because the rookie guard has been playing like a professional since before his debut with the Wizards, Johnson has caught the attention of veteran players and coaches around the league. The three-level scorer talks about his shooting technique, keeping his composure on the court, and how his mental fortitude keeps other players from knocking him off his game.

by **MAYA JONES**
photographed by **MIA BUTLER**





Wizards shooting guard **Tre Johnson** lies on a couch upside down, using the arm of his long-sleeve shirt to wipe his eyes before letting out a big yawn.

A small smirk crosses his face as I tell him how comfortable he looks during our mid-morning video chat introductions.

But once the interview begins, Johnson grows serious, brows knitting together and lips slightly pursed - a familiar sight for those who watch Johnson hold the same expression of stoicism on the court.

This particular week in early December, Johnson is taking it easy, resting due to a strained left hip flexor that would ultimately keep him off the court for seven games. But the 19-year-old rookie is already making his mark, leaving teammates and fans excited by his basketball prowess, the hunger he brings to the team, and his ability to shoot from anywhere on the court, forcing opponents to stay on their toes.

During a season centered on growth and development, Johnson holds tightly to the advice he and the team are given by veteran teammates. Although veteran guard CJ McCollum was acquired by the Atlanta Hawks

in a December trade, his impact was felt and his voice was heard, with Johnson recalling McCollum's early-season advice: Just keep swimming.

"CJ liked to tell everybody 'just keep swimming,'" Johnson says. "That was his thing. Through all the ups and downs, just keep going. There are always going to be better days than what's going on right now. And then it's a long season, so bad games or anything, just keep pushing and keep going."

What's most impressive is Johnson being a three-level scorer, a triple threat that makes other teams rethink their plays to guard him more closely.

But that doesn't faze Johnson. If anything, it makes him want to go harder.

"I always kind of felt, even being a rookie, that I could always do it, but I just had to tweak my mindset," Johnson says. "I just have to shift my mentality with the role that I was given."

Johnson credits his upbringing for being the player he is today, but also knows that his journey is far from over. This is only a small taste of what's to come in the future.

Johnson's passion for basketball began in his hometown of Garland, Texas, a sprawling city just northeast of Dallas. It was his father's influence, watching old basketball footage of Richard Johnson II's time at Baylor University then Midwestern State University, that persuaded the younger Johnson to pick up a basketball and give it a try on his own.

"My passion came from my dad," Johnson says. "Just seeing the fun he had and everybody else on the court had with [basketball] and then getting into it myself, but I really didn't think I was going to be here. I didn't think that it was going to be my everything until my





freshman, sophomore year of high school. That's when I knew I had a chance to make basketball my everything."

When he wasn't on the court, Johnson was watching others on the court. And when there were no games being played, Johnson grabbed his phone and continued studying the sport through YouTube videos. It was also in his formative years when Johnson trained with his father and began to learn true form, specifically his unique shooting style, which has become his calling card on the professional level. Soon, recreation centers became his home, and basketball became his life. For Johnson, nothing else existed.

"I used to work out with my dad a lot," Johnson says. "He didn't like when I used to shoot. I used to not jump straight up and down. I used to work on fading, falling left, falling right, pushing back some. Whatever to get the shot off. So that's why I look crazy in the game, but I'm able to shoot a high clip of it because I work on it a lot."

Outside of his father, Johnson closely watched players like Kobe Bryant and Carmelo Anthony, admiring the way they created their own shots, played midrange and had great footwork.

By the time Johnson reached Lake Highlands High School in Dallas, he started as a freshman, scoring 30 points in the very first game of his high school career. In 2023, Johnson led the team to their first UIL Class 6A championship title since 1968.

At each stage of his high school career, Johnson focused on different parts of his game.

"At Lake Highlands, I was just more focused on scoring. I also did pass and get others involved, but I just say my main focus and priority was on scoring, and it was a question, 'Could I play with other good players?'" Johnson says, recalling the change in approach when he'd later transfer to Link Academy. "So I feel like I kind of did that and showed that at Link. I played more of a passing role and played with other good players and still was able to win games."

His senior year, Johnson transferred to Link in Branson, Missouri, and finished his high school basketball career with 2,563 points. While being ranked No. 5 in the nation, Johnson brought his talents back to his home state, announcing that he'd attend the University of Texas for college. In 33 games, Johnson finished with 658 points (averaging 19.9 points per game), 89 three-pointers, 103 total rebounds, 90 assists and 31 steals.

Three months later, Johnson smiled widely, hugging his father, mother and siblings. Johnson pulled the Washington Wizards cap over his dreadlocks and proudly stood on stage with NBA Commissioner Adam Silver as the sixth overall pick in the 2025 NBA Draft.

This would be Johnson's first time on the professional level, playing with and against the most respected ballers in the league.

But nothing seems to shake Johnson, not even players who talk trash or try to give rookies their “welcome to the NBA” moment. Johnson remains focused.

“Can’t nobody get into my head,” Johnson says. “My father’s got into my head a few times, a lot of times when I was younger. And he knows me better than anybody, so I feel like I learned how to block him out and him not being able to get into my head, I feel like nobody can. I just ignore it, to be honest.”

Johnson played two games in the 2025 NBA Summer League before suffering a hamstring injury, but showcased his skills, shooting 58.3% from the field and averaging 19.5 points.

Wizards assistant coach J.J. Outlaw watched Johnson in Summer League. He saw how important basketball was to Johnson, Outlaw says. He was a serious individual, all about the game and his craft, and taking his talents to the next level.

“At first, he was a man of few words, but in getting to know him and breaking down those barriers between each other, we’ve developed a really nice relationship personally and work relationship where we can share things between each other and we can have conversations in games,” Outlaw says. “Sometimes they’re heated conversations, but I know that basketball and winning is the most important thing to him, so it allows us as a staff to coach him hard and he responds.”

Not only did his skills stand out to Outlaw, but the confidence he brought to the court was center stage. Not cocky, not arrogant, but a belief in himself and the ability to play hard and take chances that made Johnson command attention.

“He’s played in big games against top talent his entire life, but to step out on the floor for your first NBA-sanctioned game, and just seeing how he moved, how he was able to go get it, how easily the game came to him,” Outlaw says.

“I remember somebody in Summer League asking me, ‘Did you sense any nerves from Tre?’ And my response to that person was, ‘Tre doesn’t get nervous.’ I still believe that, and that still holds true 20 some odd games into the season.”

Johnson is used to different coaching styles and adapts in any situation. The many strengths of the 6-foot-5 guard are evident on the court, especially his shooting, but Johnson does admit there is pressure that comes with being able to shoot from nearly anywhere on the court.

“Not too many people want you to take the midrange jump shots, so I feel like having the confidence to take the shot and having the confidence to make the shot is probably the most pressure,” Johnson says.

As Johnson continues to find his path in his young career on the court, he’s also navigating life outside of basketball. Johnson’s hobbies include, well, trying to find hobbies outside of basketball.

Most recently, Johnson went to a golf range and also bought a book that he admittedly hasn’t finished yet, but is enjoying. He and teammate Bub Carrington have even toyed with the idea of 7-on-7 flag football during the offseason, but it’s still up for debate.

For now, Johnson is completely okay with sticking to basketball – a game that comes naturally to him, and a sport that always feels like home. He knows that if he just keeps swimming, just keeps pushing, he’ll continue to grow into the player he wants to become.





TRE'S JOURNEY TO D.C.

From Texas to Washington, Tre has left his mark.

Wizard rookie guard Tre Johnson has made an impact everywhere he's played. He led Lake Highlands High School to a state championship in 2023 before committing to the University of Texas. As a freshman, Johnson started all 33 games and averaged 19.9 points, 3.1 rebounds, and 2.7 assists while posting shooting splits of .427/.397/.871. His standout season earned him SEC Freshman of the Year, Second-Team All-SEC honors, and the Texas freshman scoring record after dropping 39 points vs. Arkansas.

Since arriving in Washington, he's continued to make an impact.

LED ALL FRESHMEN IN COLLEGE BASKETBALL IN SCORING

ONLY FRESHMAN WITH 125+ MADE TWOS, 100+ MADE FREE THROWS AND 75+ MADE THREES

FIRST FRESHMAN TO LEAD TEXAS IN SCORING since Kevin Durant 2006-07, 25.8 PPG

ONLY FRESHMAN TO AVERAGE 18+ POINTS, 2.5+ ASSISTS AND 6+ THREES attempted per game

1 OF ONLY 5 FRESHMEN IN THE LAST DECADE IN A POWER 5 CONFERENCE TO SHOOT 41% ON CATCH AND SHOOT 3S other freshman:

Jamal Murray, Brandon Ingram, Trae Young, Malik Monk

LED SEC IN SCORING

— the most competitive conference in the U.S.

2ND HIGHEST PPG

among freshmen in Texas history

4TH AMONG ROOKIES IN THREES made

per game with 2.1

BECAME THE FIRST WIZARDS ROOKIE TO RECORD 10+ PTS IN EACH OF HIS FIRST FIVE CAREER GAMES since John Wall

(14 straight games) in 2010

1 OF 2 ROOKIES WITH 50+ 3PM WHILE SHOOTING OVER 40% FROM THREE-POINT RANGE

the other rookie is Kon Knueppel, CHA

CONNECTED ON 9 STRAIGHT 3PM for the most consecutive

makes by a rookie in team history

*STATS AS OF JAN. 4, 2026





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Favorite Smoothie

Malaki Branham

My go-to smoothie
is passion fruit.

Bub Carrington

Any type of mango smoothie.

Justin Champagnie

Strawberry banana.

Sharife Cooper

Strawberry banana.

Bilal Coulibaly

Pineapple mango.

Kyshawn George

Strawberry, banana, protein,
collagen, creatine, and milk.

Anthony Gill

I have a very complicated order:
a lot of blueberries, a lot of
spinach, four strawberries,
half a short glass of orange juice,
half a banana, vanilla whey
protein, collagen, creatine,
almond butter, chia seeds,
cinnamon, and water.

AJ Johnson

Strawberry banana.

Tre Johnson

Strawberry banana.

Khris Middleton

Strawberry, pineapple,
and banana.

Will Riley

It's called the
Three-Point Blend.
It has a mix of berries,
banana, spinach,
almond milk, and
vanilla whey protein.

Alex Sarr

My smoothie has peanut
butter, almond milk,
banana, and strawberry.

Tristan Vukcevic

My go-to includes
berries, açai,
Greek yogurt, and milk.

Cam Whitmore

A mixed berry
smoothie.

Trae Young

Strawberry, banana,
and protein powder.



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Building Inclusive



At halftime of the Washington Wizards Nov. 25 win over the Atlanta Hawks,

the Wizards Dancers team were joined by new faces. Over 175 D.C. public school students took the floor at Capital One Arena, performing an NBA-level choreography in front of more than 15,000 fans for the very first time.

Those students were part of the inaugural District of Dance program, a first-of-its-kind dance mentorship program with the Washington Wizards. District of Dance is an evolution of District of Play, a multi-million-dollar initiative launched last year to expand youth sports access across Washington, D.C.

Derric Whitfield, senior dance teams director envisioned building dance-based programming into District of Play earlier this year. For Whitfield, this initiative was an opportunity for the Wizards Dancers to share their passion with the students while modeling the life skills that dancing instills.

"There's so much that dance teaches you, from grace and poise to discipline and being able to self-correct," Whitfield says. "It teaches you how to navigate through life as a person."

District of Dance, in partnership with nine different District of Columbia

Community THROUGH DISTRICT OF DANCE



Monumental Sports & Entertainment's District of Dance blends creativity and character-building, showing how dance can shape skills that last far beyond the studio

BY BECKETT HARRISON

photographed by **DREW XERON**



Public Schools, assigned each school a mentor: a Wizards dancer who not only helped teach choreography, but also spoke with the students about how they navigated their own dance journey toward a professional career. Bridging the gap between grade-school level dance programs and industry-leading choreographers and dancers helps encourage younger students to continue following their dreams in the dance space.

For the students who participated, the choreography was no easy task. Whitfield's team worked closely with school dance teachers to teach NBA-level choreography, challenging the kids to work together to perform a standard halftime entertainment routine. That meant hours upon hours of trying, failing, and trying again.

The success of the performance and program quickly fostered new ideas on how to expand District of Dance in the coming years. To Whitfield, that could look like a large-scale dance convention open to a wider range of school districts. He said that a productive balance between feedback-driven instruction and team competition will be the backbone of the program's prospective future.

Marycate Walsh, Vice President of External Affairs oversees District of Play, and sees District of Dance as an opportunity to introduce affordable athletics to a greater number of kids, especially girls, across the city.

"In D.C., there's the largest play gap between boys and girls in the entire nation," Walsh says. "This was a co-ed program, but we knew that this would be a great way for us to provide more options to girls and others who might not see themselves as traditional athletes."

Despite the well-known benefits of youth sports—improved physical health, mental well-being, and emotional resilience—many children still face barriers to play. District of Play serves to bridge those gaps, focusing first on children who are limited due to lack of access to resources.

"Playing sports, being active, and being on teams teaches so many lessons that transcend the moment itself. They're there to play, but they're getting so much more out of it," Walsh says. "We see District of Play as an investment into our city and our future leaders."





KHRR MIDDLETON

As a vet in the league, what road advice or travel lessons would you give to the young players on the team? My road advice would be take your naps. Seriously, take your naps.

Was there a piece of advice that you received that was especially helpful? The best advice I got was to find a routine.

With the NBA schedule including back-to-backs, what is the key to adjusting and being ready the next day? I think the key is staying consistent with your routine.

What's your go-to move on the plane – reading, watching a show, or sleeping? All of the above. I do a little of everything: Read, watch a show, and sleep.

What's the first thing you do when you get to a hotel? First thing has to be turn the TV on.

photographed by
KENNY GIARLA



Do you explore new places and restaurants, or stick to the same spots? I usually always go back to the same spots.

What makes for a good road city – walkability, weather, restaurants? Great restaurants make a road city great.

Which cities do you get excited to play in? What is your favorite road arena? I get excited for the warm cities. As for favorite arena, that's tough. I don't really have one.

Does your preparation or game day routine change for a home versus road game? No, my routine stays the same for both.

When you're traveling, whether it's for business or leisure, what are your top three travel essentials? My iPhone, iPhone charger, and a duffel bag.

Where are your favorite places to vacation? Somewhere on the beach, somewhere warm.



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Vaults



CAPITAL ONE ARENA TURNS HEADS WITH ITS FIRST-CLASS INNOVATIONS

Capital One Arena ushers in new era with state-of-the-art spaces in multi-million-dollar transformation

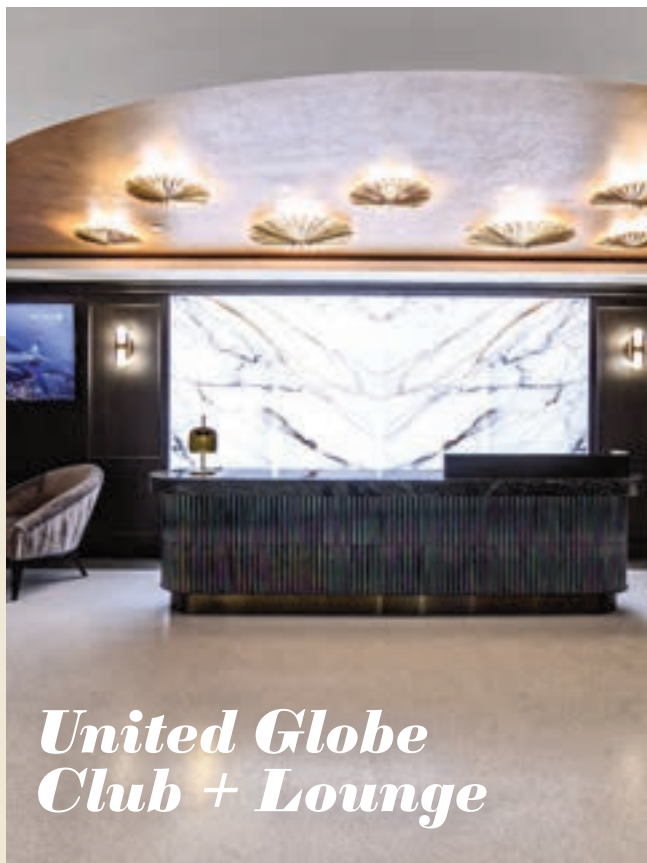
by **MAYA JONES**

photography by

CRAIG HUNTER ROSS and **RICH KESSLER**

Use your imagination for a moment.

You're walking into Capital One Arena as a VIP guest, being escorted to one of the most beautiful, new innovative spaces, courtesy of Monumental Sports & Entertainment (MSE) and its global partner United Airlines. The spaces exceed expectations, transforming



*United Globe
Club + Lounge*





sporting events into a full-fledged immersive experience.

Walking into the United Globe Club, a space that holds 800 guests, the pristine details stand out the most. Maybe it's the United Airlines 777 model plane suspended in the air right over the bar that catches the eye first. Or maybe it's the wall built of suitcases, some of them opened and displaying memorabilia from D.C. sports teams. It could be the engagement wall with reproduced ticket stubs from icons and legends. But maybe one of the coolest pieces? A United Airlines ticket signed by Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1963, courtesy of MSE's partnership with clct, a collectibles and memorabilia agency founded by Darren Rovell.

"They sort of became our in-house historians for the building," says Adam Gotts, vice president of project and revenue management. "They were able to source and loan to us this boarding pass ticket envelope that was signed by Martin Luther King in 1963 for United Airlines. So it's really the perfect kind of piece to introduce in that space and we really hope that it's going to be something that fans have the ability to walk by, interact with, and kind of just get a really cool peek into history."

After taking in the scene at the Club, Wizards Courtside Row AAA seat holders and Capitals Row A seats on the glass can pop over to the United Globe Lounge, where fiber optics and impressive

installations are literally the stars of the area. The 180-guest capacity makes for a more intimate environment.

Both areas include entrances from the street directly to the United Club or Lounge for fans who appreciate a VIP affair while enjoying a game or event.

The transformation also includes the Lexus Vaults, which have chef-curated menus and cocktails. But what stands out most in the Vaults is the artwork, much of which was produced by local artists. One example comes from Candice Tavares, a Baltimore wood artist and illustrator, created three incredible pieces of John Wall, Bob Dandridge, and Elvin Hayes.

Fans who want this experience won't have to use their imagination much longer. The club, lounge and vaults are open and ready for fans to enjoy. Nearly all of the new renovations, totaling more than \$800 million, were designed with fans in mind. Sixty percent of the budget is to support fan upgrades for a better experience.

"I think that warmth and attention to detail and service as people are coming into these premium spaces has really been noticed by our fans," Gotts says. "And that's something that we want to make sure that we extend not only to our premium guests, but every single guest that comes through the building as we start to bring to life more of these fan-facing spaces."





Favorite Plane Snack



Marvin Bagley III
PB&J.

Malaki Branham
Lifesaver gummies.

Bub Carrington
Fruit snacks.

Justin Champagne
PB&J.

Sharife Cooper
PB&J.

Bilal Coulibaly
I always have a ginger ale
with cranberry juice.

Anthony Gill
Applesauce.

AJ Johnson
Barbecue chips.

Tre Johnson
PB&J.

Khris Middleton
Salt & vinegar chips.

Will Riley
Popcorn.

Alex Sarr
PB&J.

Tristan Vukcevic
Reese's.

Jamir Watkins
Biscoff cookies.

Cam Whitmore
Gummy bears.

Trae Young
Popcorn.

A low-angle shot of a basketball hoop in a gymnasium. The hoop is centered at the top, with a bright light shining through the backboard. The backboard has "SE" and "JACO" logos. The net is red and white. The gym floor is polished wood, reflecting the hoop and the seats. The seats are red and arranged in rows on both sides of the court. The text "THE ULTIMATE TAILGATE" is overlaid in large white letters, and "sam's club" with a double arrow icon is below it.

THE ULTIMATE TAILGATE

sam's club <>





WILL RILEY

Have you always loved ice cream, and is ice cream your favorite dessert? Yes, ice cream is my favorite dessert. It's been my favorite dessert for as long as I can remember. I've loved it since I was a kid.

Can you remember the first time you ever had ice cream? What was the flavor or setting?

I don't remember the exact moment, but I'm sure the first flavor I had was cookies and cream.

Do you associate ice cream with any special moments or traditions? Honestly, ice cream is one of those things you can have after any meal. It's the perfect dessert for pretty much any occasion.

Were ice cream treats a regular part of your childhood, or more of a special occasion? There was always an old, freeze-dried tub of ice cream in the back of the freezer that I'd scoop from every now and then. So, I'd say it was more of a regular thing, it was always there.

Was there a flavor or type of ice cream you loved as a child that you don't anymore, or vice versa? I used to really love like a cookies and cream Blizzard from Dairy Queen, but now it's a little too much for me.

What's your all-time favorite ice cream flavor, and why? Cookies and cream, always. It's been my favorite my whole life.

photographed by
KENNY GIARLA

SHOT AT YALA ICE CREAM IN
GEORGETOWN, WASHINGTON, D.C.





Do you like classic flavors, or are you more into adventurous combinations? Honestly, I'm pretty adventurous, unless it involves coconut. I'm not a big coconut guy.

Have you ever tried a flavor that totally surprised you? Yeah, there are a lot of lime-based flavors I didn't expect to like, but they turned out to be really good.

If you had to pick one ice cream flavor to eat for the rest of your life, which would it be? Cookies and cream.

If you could create a flavor, what would the base be and what toppings would you include? Probably vanilla with a bunch of Oreos and caramel.

RAPID FIRE

Cup or cone?
Cone

Chocolate or vanilla?
Vanilla

Go-to ice cream spot?
Häagen-Dazs

Gelato or ice cream?
Ice cream

Best time of year for ice cream?
Summer, like August

Do you like toppings? If so, which ones?
Yes, Oreo cookies

Who makes the best store-bought ice cream?
Häagen-Dazs

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*ammonia and fecal malodor **vs. leading value clumping litter

More Than a Mascot

G-WIZ BRINGS THE ENERGY

Nothing brings fans together like a mascot at a sporting event. As representatives of the team, mascots give fans the freedom to cheer louder and be as silly as they wish. Few mascots are as entertaining or as engaged with fans as the Washington Wizards' G-Wiz.

Introduced in 1997, G-Wiz is the official mascot of the Wizards. Many wonder what G-Wiz even is, but it depends on who you ask. Opposing teams see him as a menace, while NiceKicks has referred to him as "The best sneakerhead mascot in the NBA," and every Wizards fan sees him as their best friend.

G-Wiz loves all things basketball, video games, fashion, and memes. He stays up to date on the latest social media trends. Do yourself a favor and check out his IG @wizardsgwiz. He is so good that he recently won the NBA's 2025 Mascot Digital Content Award and was selected as an All-Star for the 2026 game in Los Angeles.

G-Wiz, while occasionally chaotic, awkward, and sporadic, is the life of the party, bringing energy to Capital One Arena every game. You may see him shooting T-shirts from a hoverboard, riding his ATV, pranking the opposing team, or just shaking his belly. No matter what he is doing, don't hesitate to ask for a photo, as he loves making new friends and catching up with old ones!

From hyping up the crowd to keeping the arena buzzing, the Wizards' lovable mascot brings the energy to fans on game days





photographed by
KENNY GIARLA



What did it mean to represent your country this summer?

What was that experience like, and did you learn anything?

It meant a lot. I was grateful to be able to put that jersey on. It's always been a dream of mine since I was a kid to play for the French National Team. I was very proud for that accomplishment.

I learned a lot, too. The international style of play is a bit different than what I'm used to, so understanding and learning that style and what it takes to win at that level was big. It showed me how much all the little details matter.

Your basketball journey has taken you all over the world – France, Spain, Australia, the U.S. How do you think that's shaped your game? It's shaped my game in a lot of ways. It's helped me learn different styles of basketball and taught me how to adapt quickly to new situations. I moved to Spain at a young age, so having to adapt and adjust to new environments early on really helped me develop that ability.

photographed by
KENNY GIARLA

**SHOT AT LA BONNE
VACHE IN GEORGETOWN,
WASHINGTON, D.C.**

ALEX SARR





Did you have any French players that you idolized growing up? My brother, Olivier Sarr.

Tell us a little bit about Toulouse, France, and growing up in the Bordeaux region. How would you describe it to someone who has never been? Toulouse is very sunny, with nice weather. It's a really chill city. Bordeaux is a bit bigger and busier, more Paris vibe, but in my heart, it's better than Paris.

What are a few of your favorite moments growing up? I love the summer months, going to see my grandparents in a small city near Toulouse. That was always something I looked forward to.

Do you have a favorite place to vacation in France? These days, I usually just go back home to Toulouse.

WHAT ARE A FEW OF YOUR FAVORITE FRENCH THINGS

Favorite food: Foie gras or crème brûlée

Favorite place to vacation: Toulouse

Favorite artist: SDM

Favorite restaurant: Siena

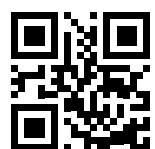
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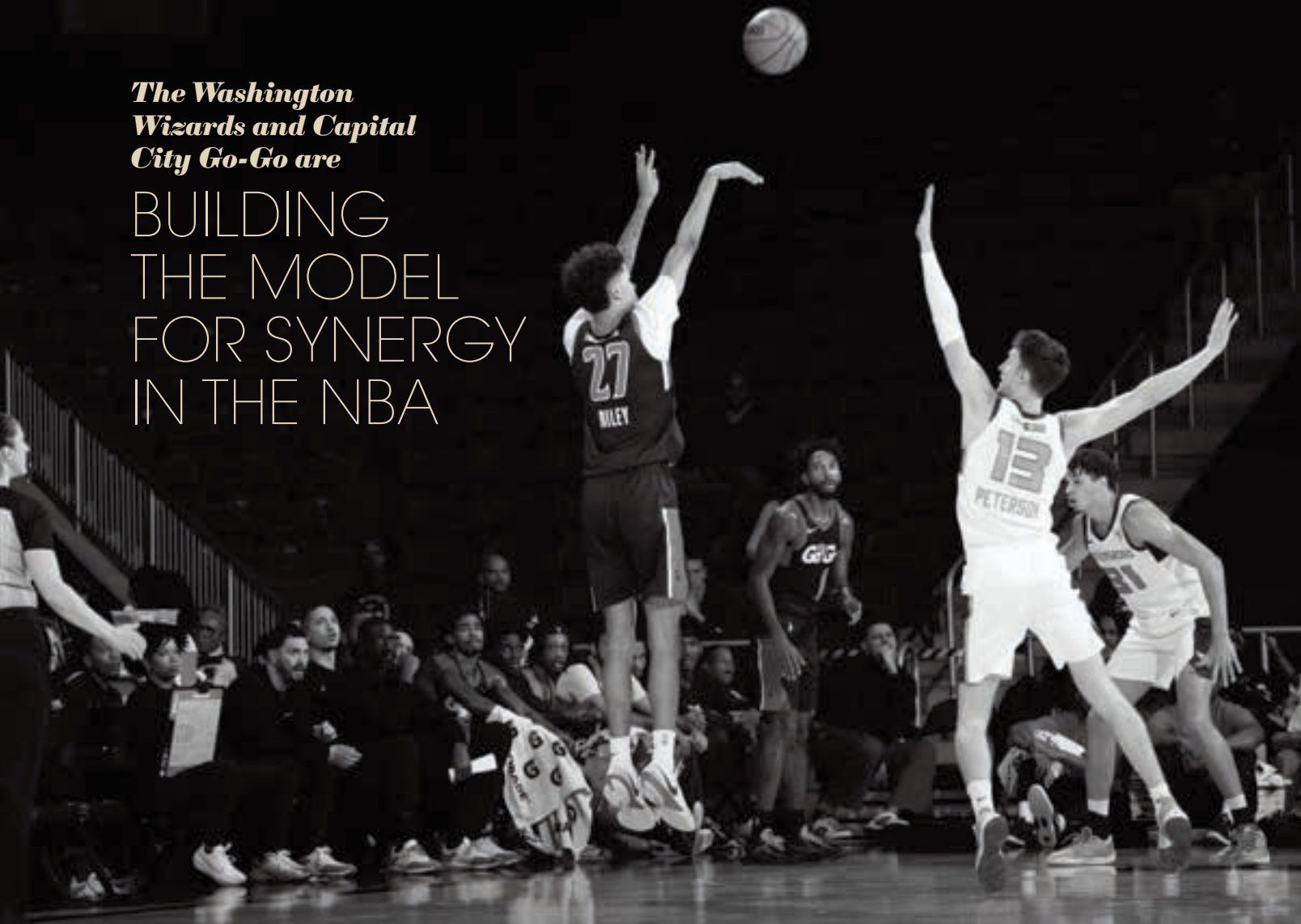
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*The Washington
Wizards and Capital
City Go-Go are*

BUILDING THE MODEL FOR SYNERGY IN THE NBA



When it comes to the Wizards and their NBA G League affiliate, the Go-Go, the teams work together, eat together, and learn together, creating one of the best bonds in the league

by **MAYA JONES**

photographs by **MARIA ABRAMS / STEPHEN GOSLING**

THE NBA G LEAGUE, the NBA's official developmental league, is filled with optimistic athletes, coaches, trainers, and officials who love where they are and what they do. Still, for players, one ultimate goal remains, being called up to the NBA.

Some G League teams may feel the dream is so far away. But when it comes to the relationship between the Washington Wizards and the Capital City Go-Go, the Wizards' NBA G League affiliate, there's hardly a difference between the two.

Go-Go Head Coach Cody Toppert, a veteran in the game who has decades of experience playing and coaching basketball at every

level, believes the synergy between the teams is the best he's experienced compared to his time with other organizations. To Toppert, there's no such thing as Wizards staff and Go-Go staff. Both are very close, and it's simply one organization.

Their arena and practice facilities are all connected, allowing the Go-Go players, coaches, and staff to be in the same building as the Wizards. They eat in the same café. They cross paths daily. Toppert attends all Wizards Head Coach Brian Keefe's coaches' meetings, ensuring constant alignment and communication.

Because of the integration, when Wizards players are assigned to Capital City, it's not treated as a demotion. Instead, it's viewed as an extension of Wizards. An opportunity for players to focus on specific areas of growth while continuing to develop within the same system. Staffs of both teams work hand-in-hand to align player development plans, track progress, and ensure a seamless transition for the player between the two teams.

That structure was on full display when the Wizards recently assigned 2025 first-round pick Will Riley to the Go-Go. A clear plan was put in place to help Riley work on targeted developmental goals. With the ball in his hands and consistent playing time, something harder to come by in the Wizards' deep rotation, Riley thrived. On Nov. 30, he recorded 36 points, six assists, five rebounds, and one steal. Shortly



after, he was recalled to the Wizards, where he showcased the progress he had made.

While the Wizards and Go-Go are coached by different staffs, their core values remain the same. Toppert embodies that connection, serving double-duty as Head Coach for the Go-Go and assistant coach for the Wizards. His role pushes him to spend time thinking about his coaching style and what would help players develop into not only better athletes, but even better people.

"Continuous learning, strategic developments, culture, and character are some of the main pillars," Toppert says. "And when it comes to coaching my team, my goal with whatever organization I'm with is to establish a people-first environment where organizational values align with individual aspirations."

"The main thing I want to do is through what I call empowered architects," Toppert continues. "What that means is trying to identify and empower players and staff to influence mindsets, break resistance to change, and build shared mental models."

Whether Toppert is coaching the Go-Go or the Wizards, sometimes within the same day, his empowerment model remains the same.

He's grateful to have the access that some other organizations may not, including being able to talk to Keefe every day, attend meetings, and learn different ways to not only improve himself as a coach, but also encourage his players, trainers and other staff. Their theme this season? Ruthless. Relentless. Refined.

Monumental Sports & Entertainment (MSE) has created an atmosphere where everyone feels like family, an aspect Toppert appreciates the most. Players remain encouraged and motivated, and the closeness between the Wizards and Go-Go ensures consistent communication and support across both teams, with Wizards players and coaches regularly in attendance to support the Go-Go.

"We just happen to wear different sweaters when we walk the sidelines," Toppert says. "During jump season, my staff is a part of everything that the Wizards do. My staff helps coach the Summer League team. I was the Head Coach of the Summer League team two years ago. So literally, there's zero separation."

No matter which logo is stitched on the jersey, the Wizards and Go-Go remain fully in sync, focused on development, growth, and turning opportunity into sustained impact.





by **BECKETT HARRISON**

photographed by **KENNY GIARLA**

The NBA has long been an industry that embraces player development. Teams fortify themselves with expansive coaching and support staffs, serving the players in all corners of their daily lives. But in a never-ending cycle of development, how do we develop the coaches who develop the players?

The Wizards newest development pathway, the Coaching Apprenticeship Program (CAP), is an in-house initiative that seeks to answer that very question. The Coaching Apprenticeship Program was created by Head Coach Brian Keefe as a bridge between former players and coaching aspirations, providing them an outlet to learn more about the many branches of being a coach. Keefe has had a long-standing passion for building up new coaches, which started as a reflection of his own experience.

"I began in the video room in San Antonio, and I had a lot of great mentors there who really helped shape my career," Keefe says. "I always thought that if I ever got the opportunity to be a head coach, I would want to pay that forward."

Keefe stressed that the apprenticeship program isn't about immediate results, nor is it about the benefits reaped by the Wizards themselves.

"We felt it was important to create a program that gave them real, practical skills, something that they could actually build a career from. Could we create a curriculum and educational experience where they could learn and then get hands-on practice so it would benefit them long term in their careers?"

There are many facets of coaching that will need no introduction for ex-professionals and collegiate players. After all, they've absorbed influential coaching for most of their lives. Instead of dwelling on the familiar redundancies of playing and coaching, the Coaching Apprenticeship Program targets less-traditional pockets of expertise that may be foreign to players. Keefe referenced collaboration with medical performance teams and front office staff, understanding and applying analytics, and creating scouting reports as diverse units in the Wizards apprenticeship syllabus.

Keefe hopes that the program can not only create more complete young coaches, but that it can also help those coaches build connections and market themselves with confidence in an often-saturated market. At a time where NBA staffs are recycled on a yearly basis, the endorsement of new faces and new ideas has never been more significant. Keefe is striving to abandon the transactional nature of development, giving back to the sport through mentorship and care.

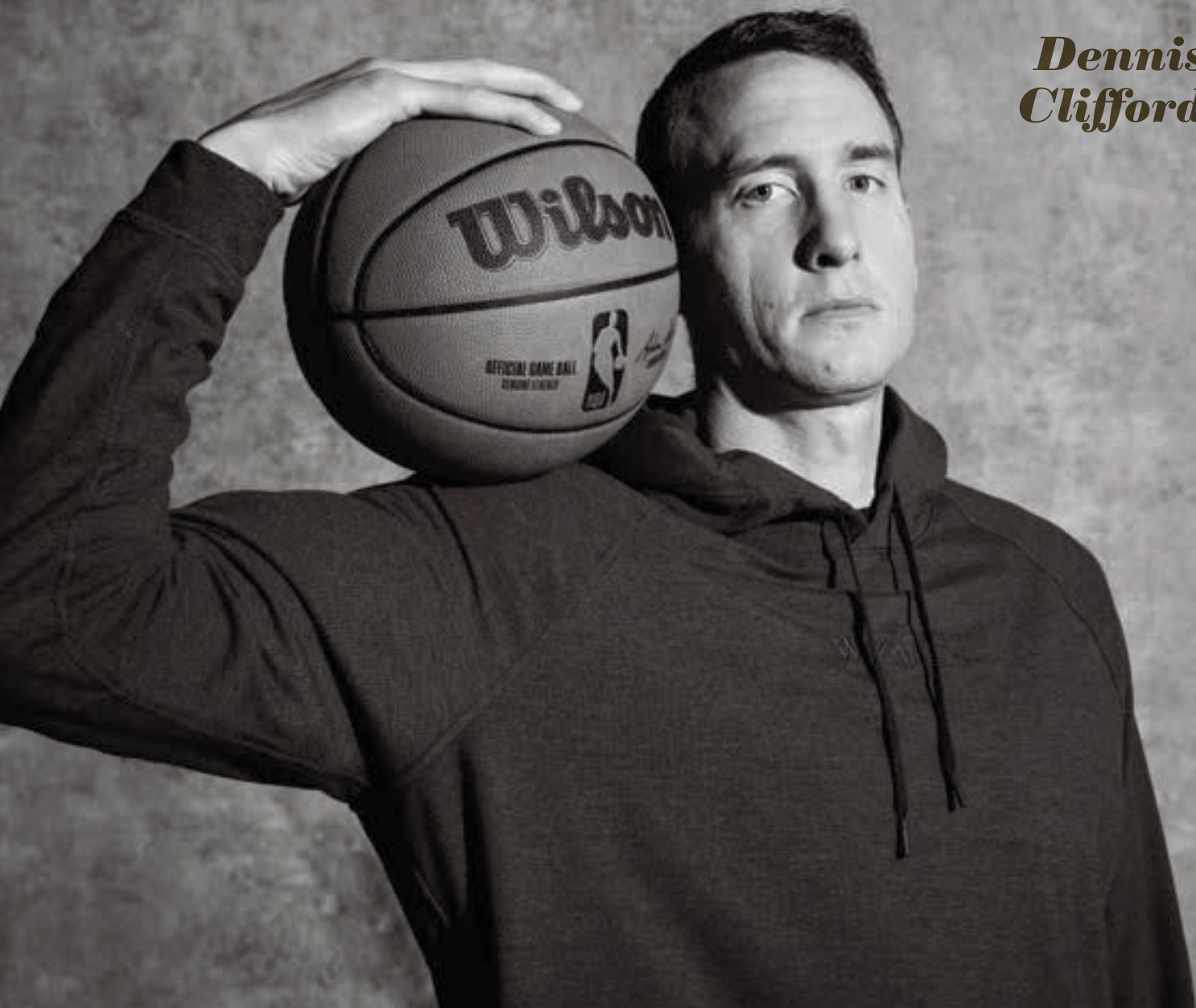
"It goes back to investing in people – learning about them, understanding who they are and what they're about, because we're really here to help guide their journey. Obviously, you need to have the basketball acumen and the skillset that comes with coaching, but can you really invest in them as people and get to know them? When you do that, you're able to help guide them along their path."

It goes back
to investing in
people – learning
about them,
understanding who
they are and what
they're about,
because we're
really here to help
guide their journey.

— HEAD COACH BRIAN KEEFE

CAP

Dennis Clifford



College: Boston College.

Did you play professionally?

If so, where? Yes. I played for the Santa Cruz Warriors and the Delaware Bluecoats, then overseas in Germany and Portugal.

Position you played: Center.

What inspired you to pursue coaching? When I finished playing, I wanted to stay around the game. I had done some performance and rehab work, and when this opportunity came up, I was really excited about learning how to be a leader at the

highest level while continuing to learn as much as I can about basketball.

When did you first realize this might be the right path for you? Between a couple of seasons, I spent two years in

Vermont, where I coached as an assistant on a high school team. I loved doing that, and it helped me realize coaching might be the path for me.

What did you appreciate most about coaches you learned from? What comes to mind first is my high school coach,

especially what he did for me off the court. That was a very transformative time in my life. He obviously helped me a lot on the basketball side. But he also held me accountable off the court, which I think was very important. Having that kind of structure from someone you respect and spend so much time with really made an impact on me.

What do you hope to learn and take away from the CAP program? I've already learned and taken away so much. From a basketball perspective, the attention to detail at this level is far

greater than I initially expected, and I've learned a lot from that. I really appreciate how much of a blessing it is to be around this level of knowledge and leadership.

Another big takeaway has been leadership itself. Because of the pressure of the NBA, you see the best type of leaders, especially when things go wrong. Being able to see what happens behind the scenes and on the court, and how people handle different situations, has been really eye-opening. That's probably what I've appreciated the most.

Kellan Grady

College: I played at Davidson College for four years, graduated, and then completed my grad year/COVID year at the University of Kentucky.

Did you play professionally?

If so, where?: I played for the Grand Rapids Gold in the NBA G League, participated with the Denver Nuggets in Summer League, training camp, and preseason – that was my rookie season. After that, I played in France, Germany, and then Poland.

Position you played:

Shooting guard.

What inspired you to pursue coaching?

I've always been interested in working in basketball once my playing days ended. I was drawn to being a part of something bigger than myself, the development of players, the growth of an organization, taking small steps toward a larger and greater goal. That's always been appealing to me. I love being a part of a team, united by one common goal striving toward that together.

When did you first realize this might be the right path for you?

I've always been interested in coaching and the front office side. Since I was a kid – middle school and high school, I've wanted to work in the NBA. In many ways, it's kind of a dream come true.

What did you appreciate most about coaches you learned from?

Their dedication. As a player, you take so many little things for granted, and now I've seen those details up close. I'm fortunate to have learned from tremendous coaches who put in an incredible amount of time. There are countless small com-

ponents that go into executing a practice plan, running and executing drills, being efficient and maintaining a positive atmosphere. I feel very fortunate to see that firsthand.

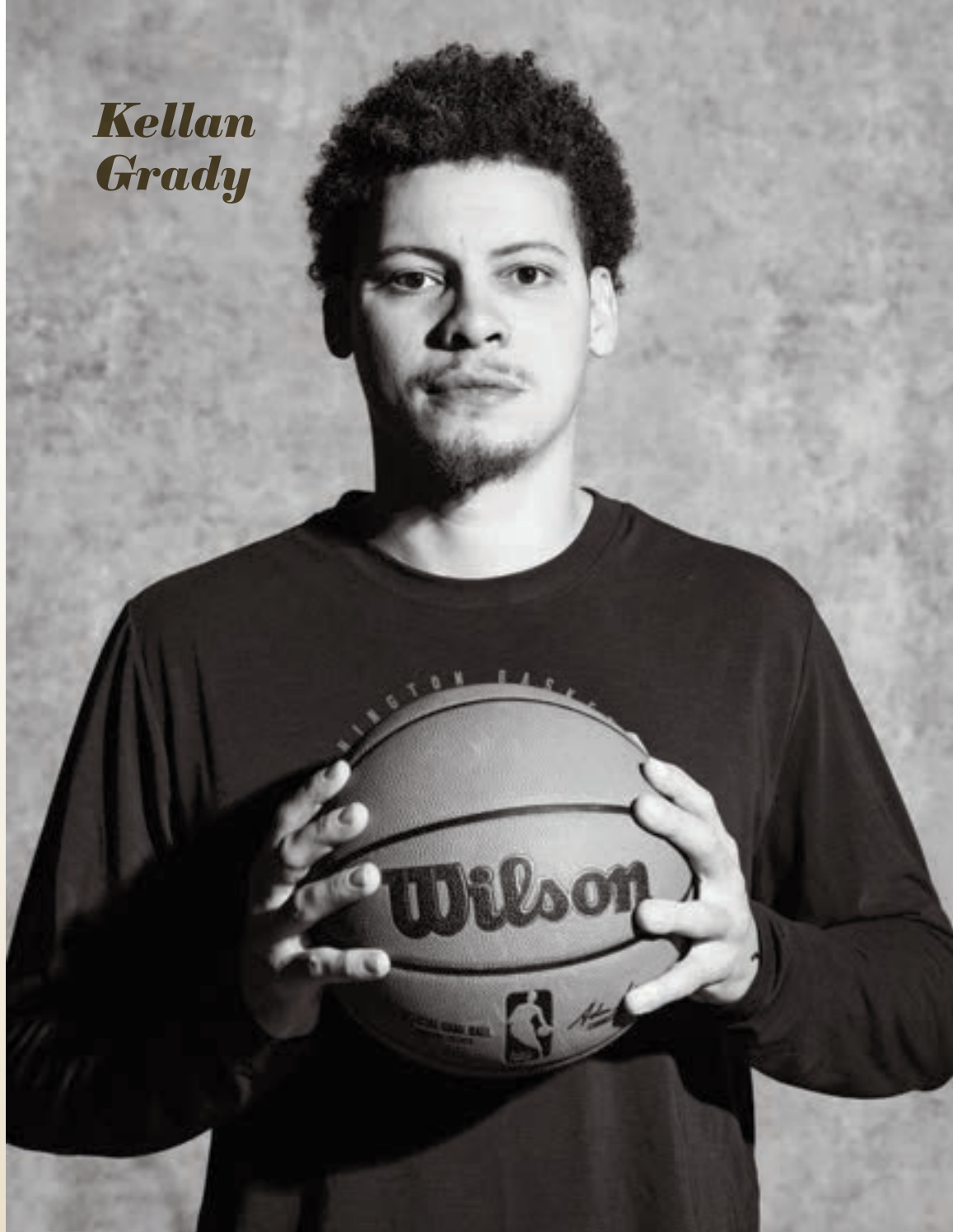
As a former player, what has surprised you the most about coaching, if anything? There's a little more film than I think we

realize as players. Which again, is many of the things we take for granted on the player side and you become much more aware of when you're coaching.

What do you hope to learn and take away from the CAP program?

I want to learn how to be a better leader and how to have a positive impact on

young, impressionable players. That's the most important thing. I also want to find myself within this profession and understand how I can add value along with what my strengths and weaknesses are. Most importantly, I hope to learn as much as I can from the great coaches above me who we're fortunate enough to learn from.





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College: Brown University, followed by a grad year at William & Mary.

Did you play professionally? If so, where? I did not; I came straight out of college.

Position you played: Forward.

What inspired you to pursue coaching? The opportunity to learn and grow my knowledge from some of the best coaches in the world. When the oppor-

tunity presented itself, it felt like something I couldn't pass up. Being able to grow, learn, and teach has had a huge impact on me and is something that's really important and impactful in my life. I'm just excited to see where this journey takes me.

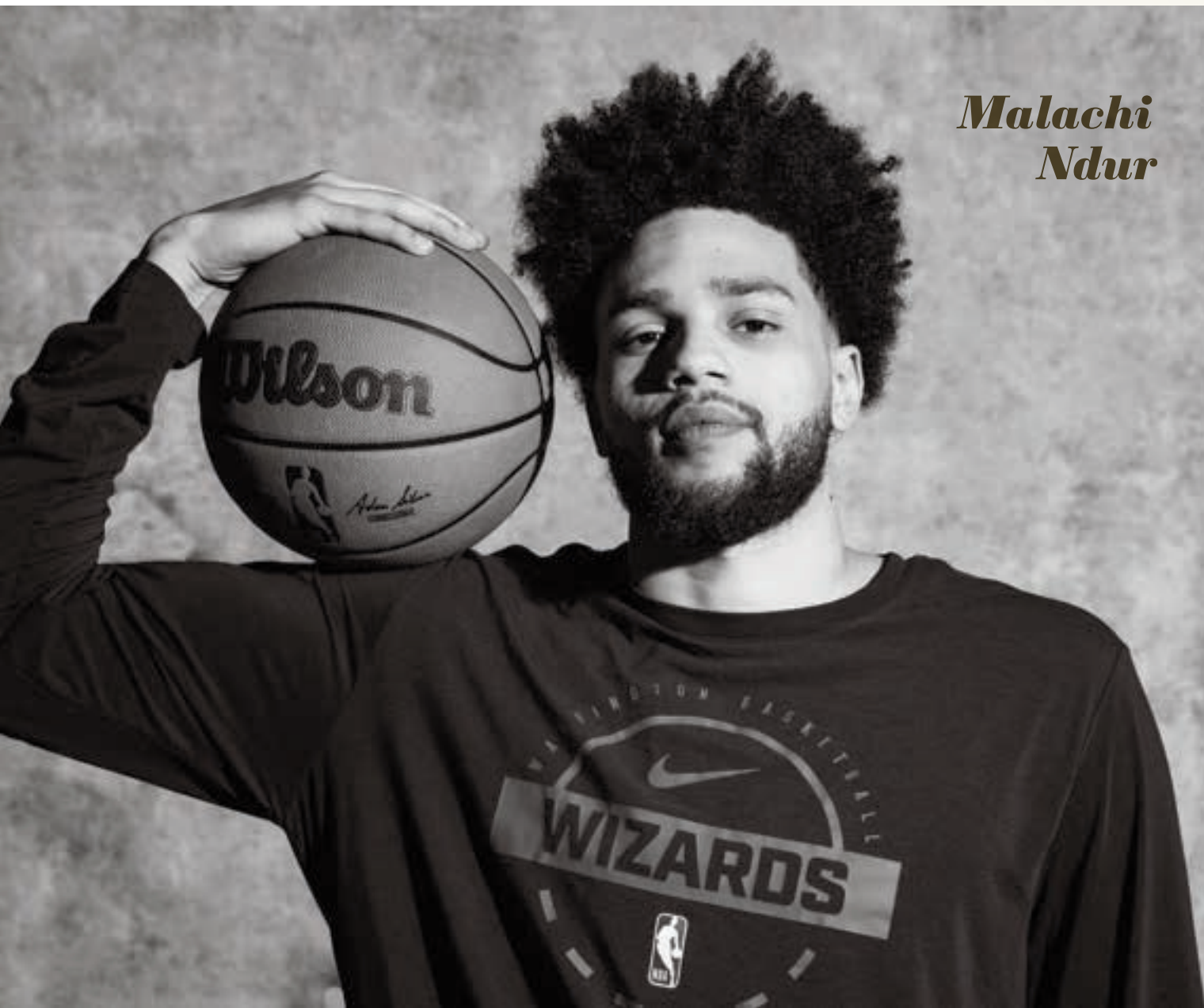
When did you first realize this might be the right path for you? I always did. Later in my college career, I saw myself as a leader on every team I played for. So, developing those lead-

ership qualities made me realize how they could translate into coaching down the line.

What did you appreciate most about coaches you learned from? Discipline and attention to detail stood out the most to me. Competing and playing basketball at this level requires a level of discipline. Attention to detail goes hand-in-hand with that, you have to be sharp, focused, and you can't have sloppy or loose ends.

What do you hope to learn and take away from the CAP program? Everything. I want to be a sponge and learn from as many spaces and perspectives as possible. Our organization is filled with great basketball minds who've been in the business for numerous years and have been part of winning environments and organizations. I want to absorb and learn as much as I can from them so that one day I can become a coach on my own.

***Malachi
Ndur***





Jason Clark

College: Georgetown University.

Did you play professionally?

If so, where? I played professionally overseas for 13 years in six different countries - Turkey, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Russia, and Belarus.

Position you played:

Shooting guard.

What inspired you to pursue coaching?

Two people inspired me to pursue coaching: John Thompson III and my high school coach Joe Woodman. Both had great coaching careers, which sparked my interest in learning more about coaching.

When did you first realize this might be the right path for you?

A couple of months ago, before I started working with the Capital City Go-Go. I was deciding my next career path and realized it was the right time to fully pursue coaching.

What did you appreciate most about coaches you learned from?

I appreciated the amount of time they invested in helping us prepare. They truly poured into us as young kids and helped us grow into men.

What do you hope to learn and take away from the CAP program?

I've learned that a lot goes into the coaching, something that I took for granted as a player. Being on this side, has helped me learn more about basketball than I knew before, and I'm looking forward to continuing to learn and grow.

College: University of Penn for undergrad and then a grad year at Drexel.

Did you play professionally? If so, where? Nope, straight to Washington, D.C.

Position you played: I was a guard-forward.

What inspired you to pursue coaching? That was always my goal after I finished playing. I

was planning to play overseas but decided I didn't want to go that route. Coaching was always what I wanted to do next. I enjoyed coaching and training younger kids when I was in high school and college, so moving into coaching just felt natural. I also love basketball and being around the game, it's been great.

You got your start with the Wizards' NBA G League affiliate, the Capital City Go-Go

before joining the Wizards and the CAP program. What are some lessons you learned that you can apply now?

Working for Go-Go Head Coach Cody Toppert and that whole staff was incredibly helpful. Cody has a huge "Game 7" mentality. Every day he's super intense and expects a really high level of performance. That made me a lot sharper.

I had never coached or even worked at the professional level

before, so everything I know came from being with him and his staff. I learned what the job looks like at this level: how to be on the court, how to train, what practices look like, how to plan practices, how coaches' meetings run, how to prepare for games. Everything was completely new to me before.

I honestly can't pinpoint just one thing, because I wouldn't be here if it weren't for spending that year with him and the staff.

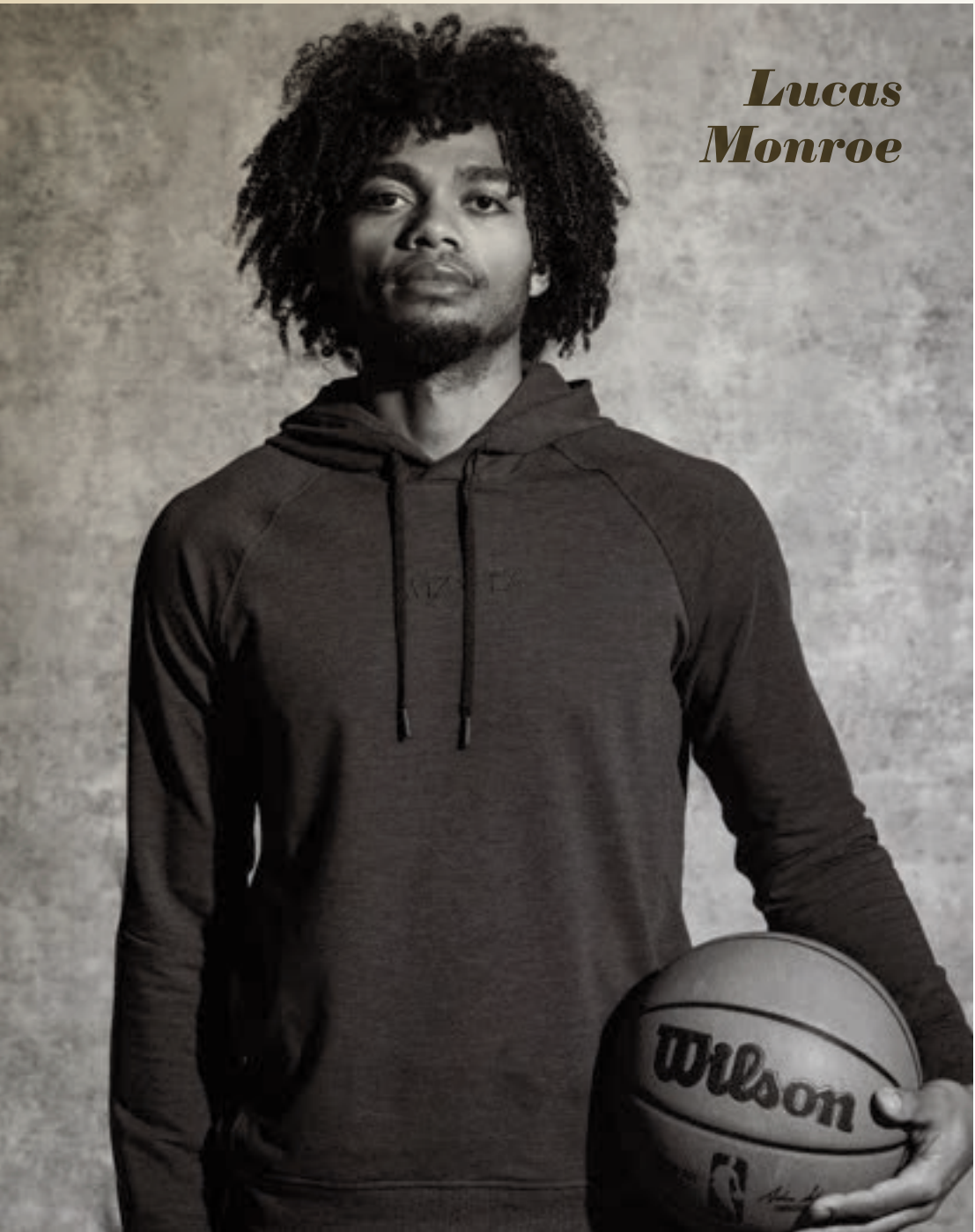
What did you appreciate most about coaches you learned from?

Again, probably the biggest influence was Cody [Toppert]. Everything he did was at 100, in a good way. I think carrying yourself a certain way and understanding that there are always eyes on you was a huge lesson. Do everything as well as you can.

What do you hope to learn and take away from the CAP program?

I really want to sharpen my coaching philosophy. Learn what's important to me as a coach and how I want to communicate with players. There are a lot of things you never think about as a player, like how new concepts are introduced, what a training camp looks like, or how you structure your practices, so they progress in a meaningful way leading up to games.

So, I'm learning what it truly looks like to be a coach and everything that happens behind the scenes. We've had a lot of cool experiences, including spending time around the front office and the scouting department. Building that synergy and connection with them has been really helpful for what we do on the court and how we watch and analyze the game now.



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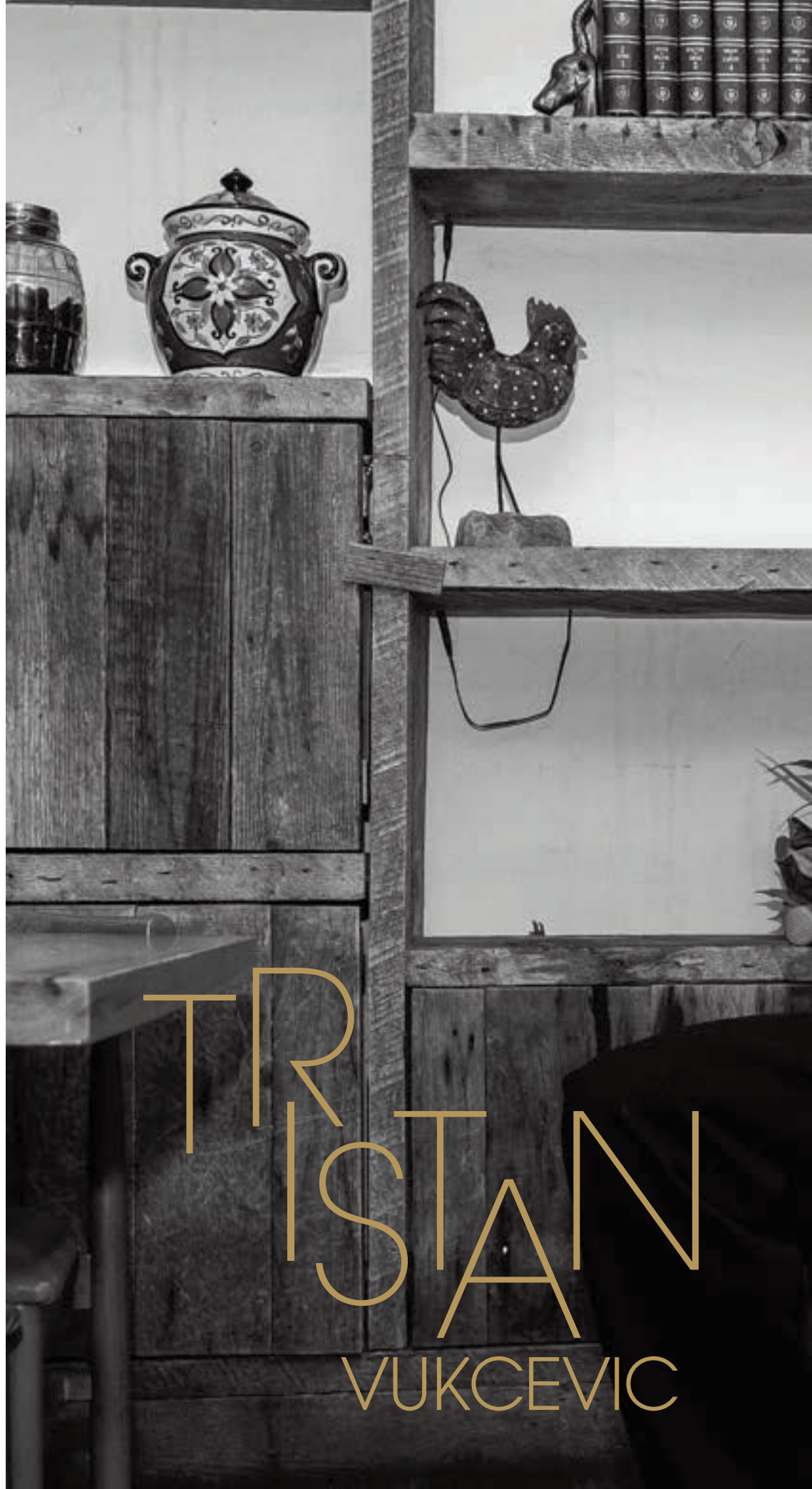
What was it like playing for the Serbian National Team this past summer? It was an incredible experience playing for my country. It's more prideful than anything. It especially made my family and my grandparents very happy. It finished early because we lost, but other than that, everything was incredible.

Your father also played basketball professionally. What have you learned from him? Pretty much everything. He taught me everything, but the main thing is just playing the right way and doing the right thing at the right time.

Your father is Serbian, and you grew up in Greece. What was it like growing up in Europe? What do you miss the most? Very different from America I'd say. Just the culture, and how things are. Obviously, I have lived in different countries, so that was also very different. Every country has its own pros and cons. What I miss the most is the food and being close to my family and to my people.

What traditions or holidays are most important in your family? We celebrate everything, so it was not really a specific holiday that I really miss. Back then I would celebrate with my family all the time, but now it's just on FaceTime. But I'd say Christmas, because of the presents.

photographed by
KENNY GIARLA
SHOT AT AMBAR RESTAURANT



TRISTAN VUKCEVIC





How does life in Serbia compare to other parts of Europe? It's more of an old-school mentality, harder life and upbringing. It's not so easy – it's just strict parents. It's different, very old school.

If someone were to visit Serbia, what's something about the culture they should know? Our food and nightlife, that's where in our culture we love to hang out. So people are always outside. Coffee shops are full, restaurants always full, and people are just outside especially when the weather is nice. When the weather is great, the whole city's out and about.

What is your favorite Serbian dish?

Cevapi. It's minced spiced grilled meat that's typically beef or lamb.

What are a few of your favorite dishes at Ambar?

Sarma [pork belly stuffed cabbage].

Cevapi [house ground beef kebab served on a spicy feta spread].

Meat pie [seasoned ground beef and minced leeks between sheets of phyllo dough and served over a lemon garlic yogurt].

Kajmak with pita bread [rich and creamy traditional Balkan skim milk spread].



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TRISTAN VUKCEVIC



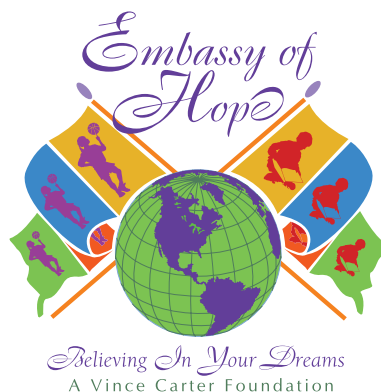
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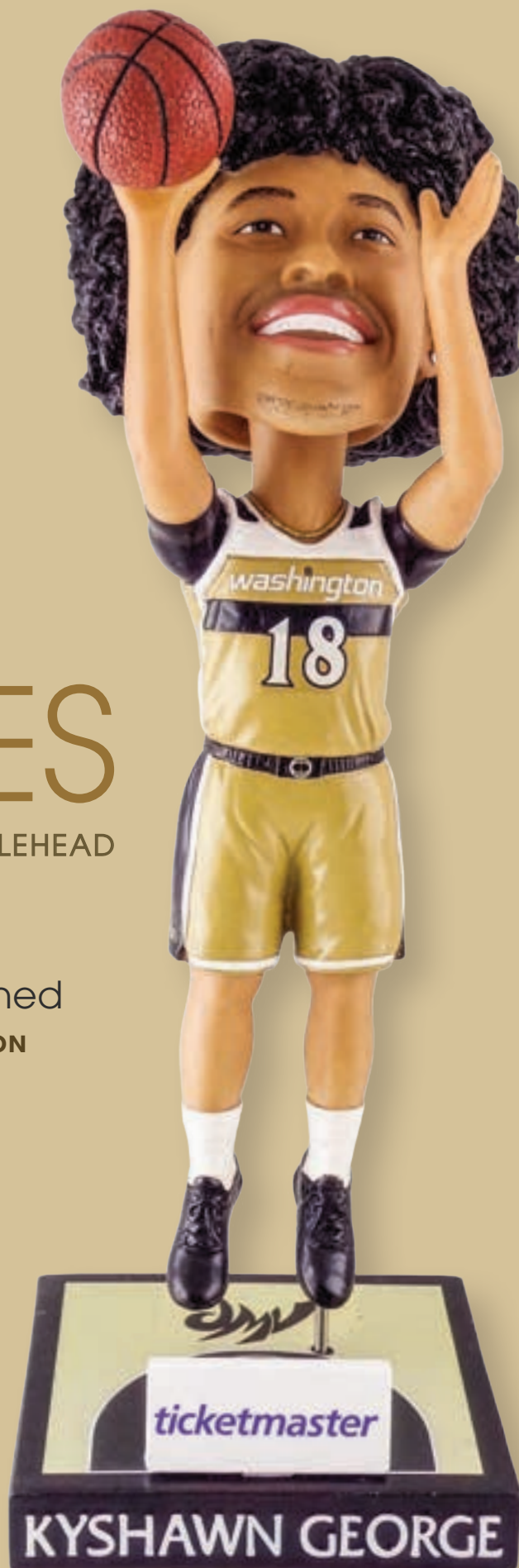
GIVING AWAY MEMORIES

KYSHAWN GEORGE'S CITY EDITION BOBBLEHEAD

An inside look at how fan-favorite
bobblehead giveaways are designed
and brought to life **BY BECKETT HARRISON**

On Friday, Jan. 2nd, the first 10,000 fans in attendance for the Washington Wizards game against the Brooklyn Nets received the newest piece of exclusive Wizards memorabilia: a Kyshawn George City Edition Bobblehead.

George's bobblehead had been months in the making, enduring a multi-step creative process to ensure quality and authenticity. The first step in that process was all conceptual. The Wizards' marketing team, in collaboration with the player themselves, decided the theme of the bobblehead. Should they be in street clothes? Did they have any special interests or traits that should be represented? Last year, the Wizards gave out a duo bobblehead of Alex Sarr and Bilal Coulibaly, equipped with magnetic props that represented their shared French heritage: a baguette, a basketball, and a French flag. In his bobblehead debut, George wore the Wizards' newest City Edition uniform, paying homage to the iconic gold alternate uniforms worn by Wizards teams from 2006 to 2009.





The next step in the bobblehead process was all in the details. George's likeness was rendered as a bobblehead using digital software, then printed into a physical mold for sampling. Even the smallest features were considered when making the mold. Facial features, accessories like his gold chain and undershirt, and sock length were all integral in capturing George's look.

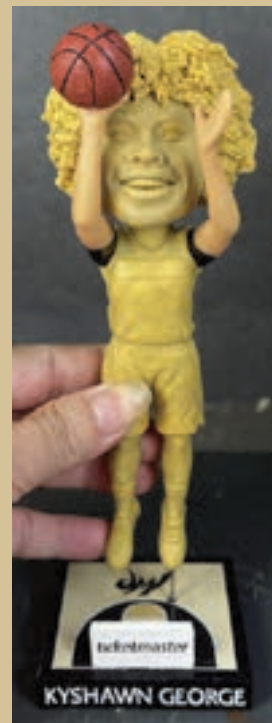
The molding process featured extensive back-and-forth between the production company, the marketing team, and the player themselves. Emily Miller, Senior Director of Integrated Marketing for the Wizards, said that younger players usually give more feedback than you would expect.

"It was a really special moment for people who had never had one, so they wanted to make sure it was correct," Miller says. "They were really collaborative in the process, and they had fun with it."

After the mold was perfected, the final step in the process was mass production. Thousands of 7-inch tall Kyshawn Georges were manufactured, each one fitted into a custom box for the fans. Even the box was designed in celebration of George and the City Edition uniform, although Miller admitted that many boxes don't make it out of Capital One Arena in one piece.

"Most people immediately wanted to open it and hold it," she said. "The biggest return was on the day of the giveaway, when we heard the comments and excitement of fans. It gave people a memory of that game, and that moment."

In that sense, the players weren't too different from the fans. Miller says that the players always asked for extras, eager to send them to family and friends. Whenever you see that bobblehead, a memory of Wizards fandom and excitement follows.







How did you get into photography? How long have you been taking photos for fun?

I've been taking photos for about two years now. One of my friends bought a camera, and I started messing around with it. He vlogs and stuff like that, so I would take pictures, shoot little videos, and help him with his vlogs. It all just felt fun and natural.

What type of photography do you enjoy the most?

Probably sports. I like the idea of staying connected and around sports after I'm done playing – almost like a retirement plan. It gives me something to do outside the game other than coaching.

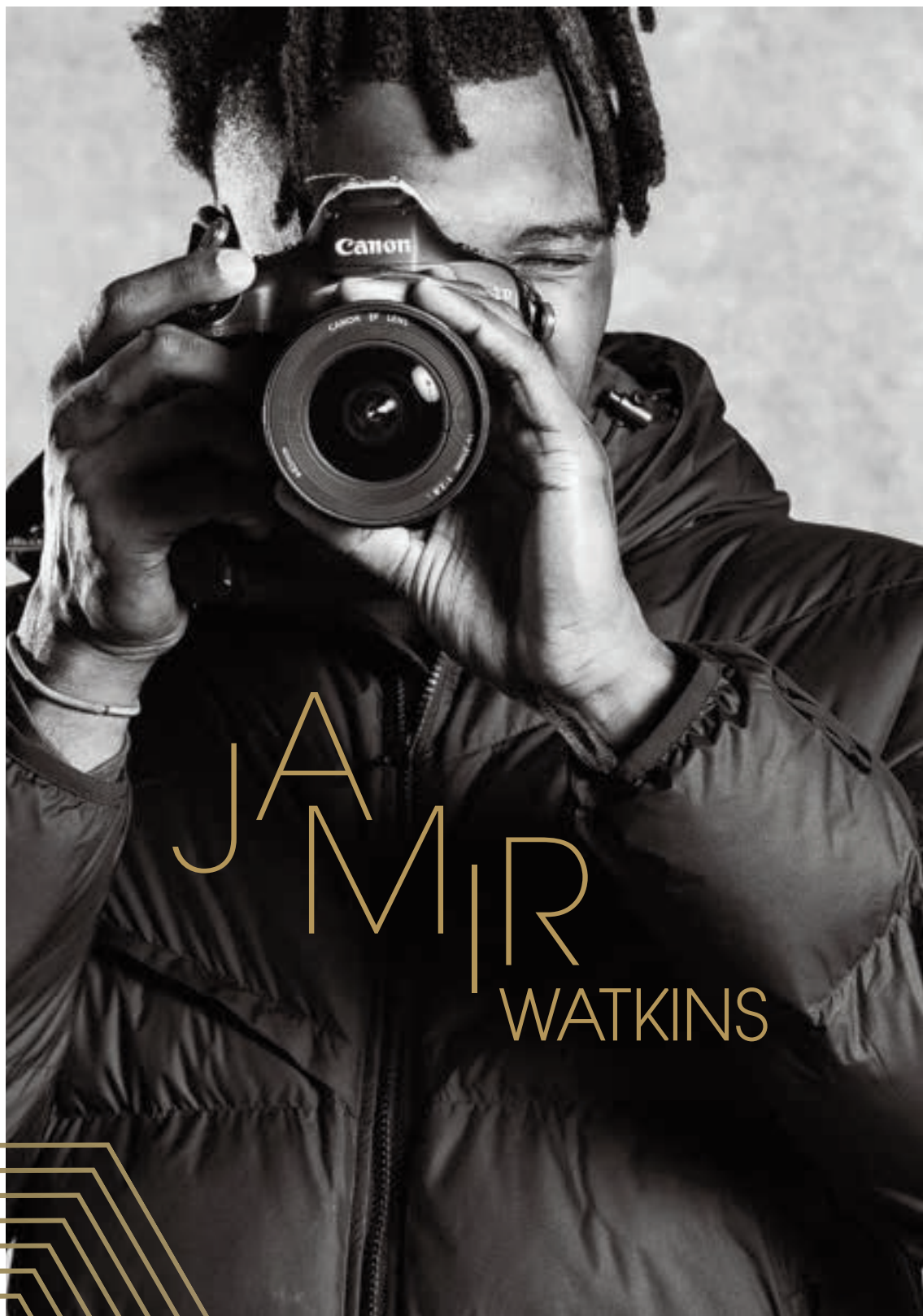
Do you have a favorite photograph you've taken?

Probably a photo I took in New York on my phone.

Is there anything in particular you look for when taking photos?

Not really. I just like anything that looks cool.

photographed by
KENNY GIARLA



JAMIR WATKINS



If you could photograph anyone or any event in the world, what would it be?

The Super Bowl. Football moves a lot slower than basketball, so it feels easier to capture good shots.

Do you prefer candid shots or posed ones? I'm not sure yet, I'm still learning.

Do you tend to take photos on your phone or on a camera? Usually on my phone.

Do you share your photos online anywhere? Mostly on my Instagram stories.

PHOTOS TAKEN BY JAMIR WATKINS





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What Makes the Best Popcorn

Marvin Bagley III

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Malaki Branham

The butter ratio is what matters.

Justin Champagnie

Butter, tons of butter.

Sharife Cooper

It has to be fresh and buttered.

Kyshawn George

It's sweet, salty, and crunchy.



AJ Johnson

Just a little bit of butter.

Will Riley

Not too much butter, but not too little either. A perfect happy medium.

Tristan Vukcevic

Warm and buttery.

Cam Whitmore

Buttery.

Trae Young

Has to be fresh and warm, preferably at the movie theatre.

A large, leafy green tree with a thick brown trunk is growing out of a basketball. The basketball is orange with black lines and is cracked open at the top where the trunk emerges. The tree is situated on a light-colored wooden basketball court floor. In the background, there is a blue stadium seating area with some lights visible.

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CAM M WHITMORE

How did you first get introduced to yoga? I went to the 2024 NBPA Performance Summit in Andalusia, Spain, and I took a class there. My current instructor Zizi was teaching it, and ever since then I started practicing yoga.

How long have you been practicing? It's been about a year.

Was there anything that surprised you about yoga when you first started?

How has your perception of yoga changed once you started practicing? What surprised me the most was that it's actually a workout. It definitely gets you sweating and preps your body for the day.

I'm not sure if my perception changed, but I do feel more at peace with myself since I started practicing.

photographed by
KENNY GIARLA



As a professional athlete, how do you fit yoga into your routine?

I fit it in whenever I can – mostly after practice when I'm not too tired. Since I started, it's really helped open my hips, which I've been focusing on a lot. It also helped with my movement, cutting, and acceleration. Just the way I play feels a bit different now.

Is there a particular pose or part of class that you look forward to each time?

I can't remember the exact pose, but there are definitely a few I enjoy.

Is there a specific type of yoga you practice?

No specific type!

Have you noticed any changes in yourself since starting yoga (like flexibility, focus, or stress levels)?

Yeah, for sure. My quads and hips are more flexible, and I've gained a little bit more hamstring flexibility, too. It's also helped with my balance, particularly my one-leg balance.

How would you describe yoga to someone who's never tried it before? Any tips?

It's a place where you can clear your mind and feel safe. Don't be afraid to mess up, even if you fall over. You can get right back up, regroup, and stay level-headed.

My biggest tip is don't give up. Honestly, just don't give up.



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Sharife Cooper

FAVORITE TATTOO

It's on my left shoulder – I got it last December. It's a boy with scratches on his face taking a broken mask off. The inspiration comes from feeling like, as a Black man in America, you often have to wear a mask. When you take it off, you see the things we all go through. I wanted to represent that.

TATTOO STORIES

Tattoos are more than eye-catching art, they tell personal stories that run deeper than what's on the surface. Wizards players open up about the meaning behind their first, favorite, and most significant tattoos.

photographed by
KENNY GIARLA

Will Riley

FIRST TATTOO

My first tattoo was of my grandma and my mom's birthdays in Roman numerals.

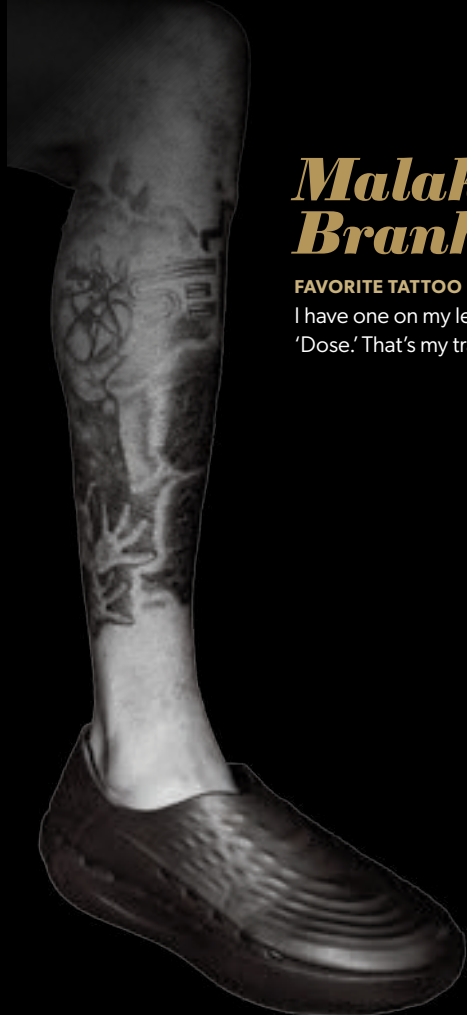




Malaki Branham

FAVORITE TATTOO

I have one on my leg that says
'Dose.' That's my trainer's brand.



Anthony Gill

MOST MEANINGFUL TATTOO

My wedding ring. I kept losing
my actual ring, so my wife
and I got our rings tattooed.



Justin Campagnie

MOST MEANINGFUL TATTOO

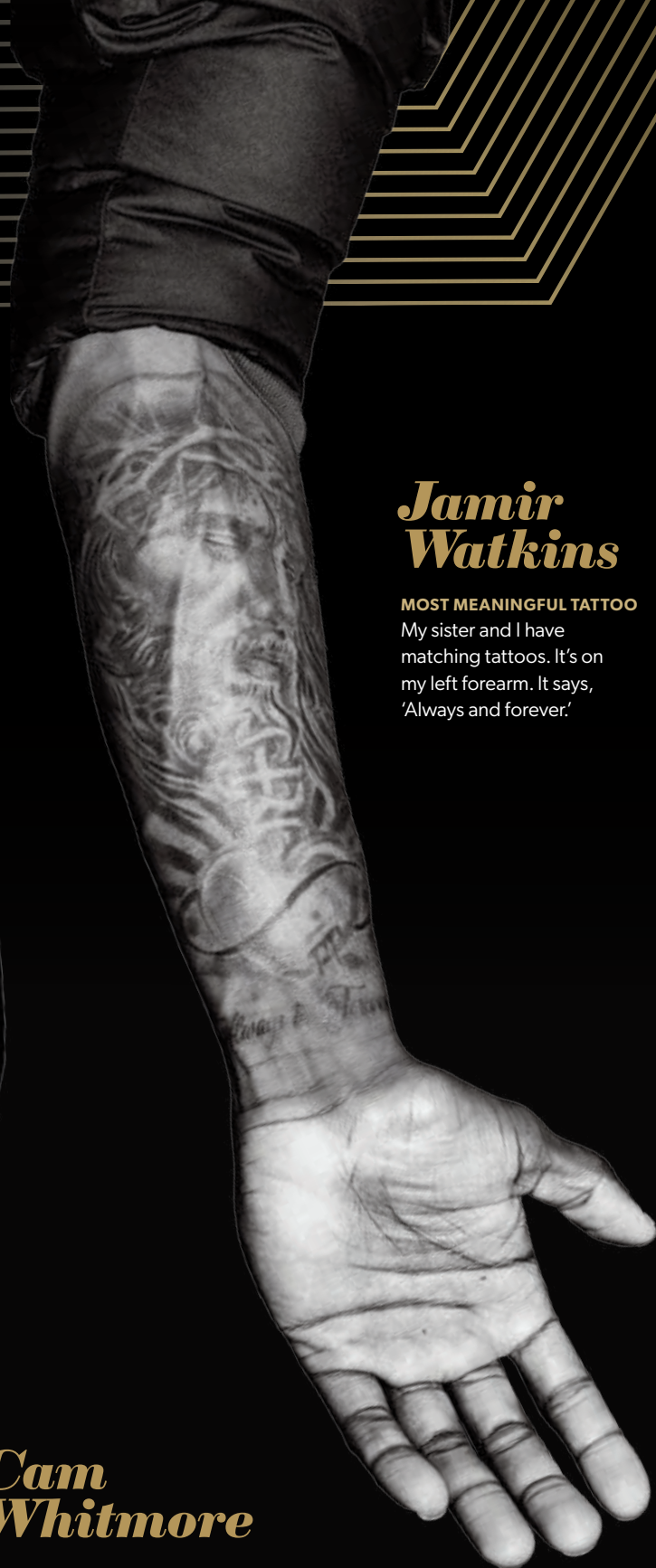
I have one on my leg that
says, 'My family is my strength
and my weakness, through them
I rise and through them I fall.'



Marvin Bagley III

FIRST TATTOO

My first tattoo was the one on my
wrist. It says 'DREAM' with a J - 'Jesus
Rules Everything Around Me.' That
was my first one, and I just kept going
from there.

A black and white photograph of a person's left arm and hand. The arm is covered in a large, detailed tattoo of a man's face with long, wavy hair and a beard. The hand is open, showing the palm. The background is dark with some geometric line patterns in the upper corners.

Jamir Watkins

MOST MEANINGFUL TATTOO

My sister and I have matching tattoos. It's on my left forearm. It says, 'Always and forever.'

A black and white photograph of a person's left arm. The arm is covered in a large, detailed tattoo. At the top, it says "THE WORLD IS" above a globe. Below the globe is a hand with the index finger pointing up. The background is dark.

Cam Whitmore

TOP THREE TATTOOS

- "The world is yours."
- "My logo, which I designed."
- "Yin and yang - I have a balanced lifestyle, and I really like the design."

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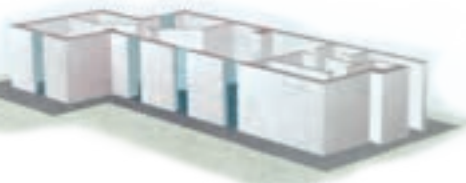
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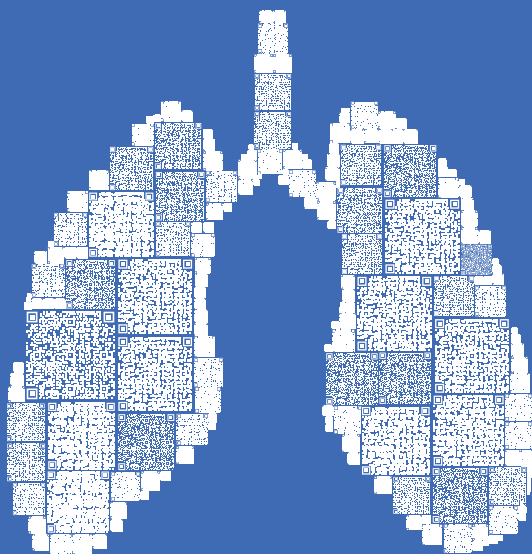
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photographed by
NAVEEN THAVATHIRU

When were you first introduced to basketball, and who played the biggest role in getting you started in the sport? I was introduced to basketball early by my grandfather and dad. My grandfather and I used to love watching playoff games

together. My dad played the sport his entire life. Between the two of them, I was always around the game. Some of my earliest memories are being in the gym with my dad, watching, listening and falling in love with the game naturally. Early on, my

dad taught me not only the game, but he taught me to approach it the right way, with discipline and confidence.

Do you have a specific game day routine or any pregame rituals? I'm very big on routine and keeping things consistent. I have the same warm up flow and mindset before each game. I have music playing in my headphones, and I always take time to visualize the game and get shots up before tip-off. My routine gets me locked in, calm, and ready to compete.

Who has had the biggest influence on the person you are today, both on and off the court, and why? My family and friends, for sure. They keep me grounded and always remind me who I am and where I came from beyond basketball. Specifically, having my two kids, Tydus and Teal, I've realized that who I am on and off the court matters. Seeing life through my kid's eyes has taught me humility, accountability, and they've pushed me to believe in myself despite all the noise.

You've been very active in the community throughout your career. What causes or initiatives are you most passionate about? Giving back has always been really important to me and that's the heart of my foundation, the Trae Young Family

TRAE YOUNG



TRAE YOUNG

Foundation. My foundation focuses on empowering youth and families through education, health, and community support.

I'm passionate about creating opportunities and access. Whether it's creating the Young Family Athletic Center in Norman, Oklahoma, hosting youth basketball camps, supporting teachers, or partnering with local organizations, I want kids to feel seen, supported, and inspired to believe in themselves. Basketball gave me a platform, and I want to use it to make a difference that lasts beyond the game.

You're a father to two kids, Tydus and Teal. What has been the most rewarding part of being a dad?

Being a dad is the most important role in my life. The most rewarding part is watching them grow and being present for those moments: the laughs, learning each day, and everything in between. Tydus and Teal give me perspective and motivation. No matter what's going on with basketball, coming home to family puts everything into perspective.

Last year, you became the assistant general manager of Oklahoma's men's basketball team. What has that experience been like so far?

It's been an incredible experience. Seeing the game from a different perspective has been very rewarding. I'm involved in recruiting and key decisions while working closely with coaching staff and players. Being able to give back to a program that shaped me has meant a lot.

When you're not on the court or training, what are some



of your favorite off-court interests or hobbies?

When I'm not playing basketball, I value downtime and relaxation. Spending quality time with my kids and family is my number one way to stay grounded and reset. I also enjoy going to the movies, music, and just finding different ways to relax and clear my mind.

Off the court, what are you most excited about or looking forward to experiencing in Washington, D.C.?

I'm so excited to explore the DMV and get to know the community. D.C. has so much energy, history, and culture. I can't wait to connect with fans, give back locally, and see all the city has to offer beyond basketball.

RAPID FIRE

Morning person or night owl?
Night owl

Text or phone call?
Phone call

City or suburbs?
Suburbs

Favorite movie or TV show?
Superman

Pregame song?
"What More Can I Say" by Jay-Z

Favorite food?
Chicken nuggets and fries

Favorite place you've been?
Madrid

Most used app?
YouTube

Dream dinner guest?
My grandfather

One thing you can't live without?
Family



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GO OR GO
BIG HOME



The new reimagined locker room is the largest in the league where a practice facility isn't attached. It also features redesigned locker stalls, upgraded family and visitors' lounges, and a dining area that is a favorite among the players.

BY MAYA JONES
PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY WASHINGTON WIZARDS

LOCKER ROOM RENOVATIONS

Washington Wizards players walked into their locker room at Capital One Arena in awe.

In a video posted to social media, the players looked around, some with wide smiles and cheeky grins, while others audibly expressed their excitement while looking around their newly designed space. Some players touched the new designs, taking in the shiny fixtures and noting what's been replaced. The reimagined locker room, which was unveiled before the team's home opener in late October, is spacious, brighter, and gives a renewed feel and energy – a stark contrast to the aged area that had been a fixture in the arena since its opening in 1997.

But the Wizards' new locker room isn't just any locker room. The team now has the largest space where a practice facility isn't attached, exceeding every other NBA team in the league. The details of the carefully crafted compound took Monumental Sports & Entertainment (MSE) and its architectural team about five years, from countless meetings and alterations before locking in the fresh, open-space concept. The dull and dark wooden locker stalls are now brighter and wider, each one proudly displaying the name of every Wizards player in large, bold white font on top.

The once-open cubby holes are now strategically hidden behind beautiful off-white padded doors that match the diamond stitch pattern of the ergonomic rolling chairs that sit in the forefront. Gone are the days of the barely padded, cold steel folding chairs that once sat in front of the players' spaces. The dark blue lush carpeting with the team's logo embedded in the floor near the locker room's entrance is the perfect tie-in to the new design, which gives off vibes of a posh hotel in downtown D.C.

Outside of the locker room, the new space now includes advanced media and analytics integration, a "hype" zone from the locker room to the court, connected recovery facilities, private dining lounge and team kitchen, and upgraded family lounges, media facilities, and visiting teams' spaces.

The biggest goal for the renovation was continuity and keeping certain areas private in order for players to feel that the space belongs solely to them when they're in it. Before, staff would have to go through players' spaces to get to their destinations. Now, there's enough room for players to have their own pathways that create a more tranquil, comfortable and less distracting environment on game days.

In its 28 years, the locker room had never been renovated to this extent. Coats of paint and basic maintenance held the space together, but MSE acknowledged that it was time for a full makeover. The old

flow and layout were outdated, created at a time when teams held a smaller number of coaches and staff members. There were 18 lockers during training camp. With the new design, the team now has 21 lockers in case more players are added to the roster at any time.

What made the project a success was being able to expand beyond the previous, smaller space. Deconstructing and relocating allowed the team to utilize vertical space that had not previously been available to them. Before, the seats in the lower bowl of the arena limited how high the ceiling was. Now, the extra space also allowed the renovated areas to shift back from the court, opening the locker room for a bigger look and feel.

From start to finish, architect Greg Tanski, who works at global architecture company Gensler, explained what it took to encapsulate a reimagined space that would be best for players, coaches and staff. When Tanski was brought aboard, he first began with conversations to get a better understanding of how MSE wanted to transform the space.

"We settled on this notion of their complex being a sanctuary for the players to come into a high functioning, highly designed space that was as distraction-free as possible," Tanski says. "So how that translates



Wizards' locker room
before renovations



into architecture, it can be things as simple as how the layout reduces the number of footsteps between all of the spaces that they will travel on a game day, whether it be the dining area, the weight room, the locker room, the training room and making sure that there's intentionality to how the space is organized."

MSE and the architecture team also went over how to make the space feel premium and elite, which included the design of the door handles, details on the lockers, the specific chairs, carpet, ceiling, and lighting. Every part of the locker room includes details that specifically keep the players in mind, with a specific emphasis on a space that is peaceful where players can stay focused.

Tanski knows that in order to deliver exactly what any client is looking for, communication is key. Throughout the months, Tanski and the team received feedback along the way, making sure every inch of the space was utilized as desired. First, Tanski went through making sure the planning was right. Even as the project changed over time, he was able to walk through a few iterations while continually working with MSE on what needed to change and what would remain the same.

"Generally, we try to start with what we call look and feel images and mood boards to get a sense of what direction the client wants to take it," Tanski says. "And then as we're in conjunction with that, we're working through the planning exercise with them to make sure that the layouts are designed in a way that they're interested and excited about."

The first phase of planning can take anywhere between six to eight weeks before 3D representation is rendered. In this case, Tanski says, they were able to show multiple options of each individual space. The process took a couple of months of meeting every other week, reviewing advancements on the designs and rendering and refining material selections. In total, Tanski estimates that it took almost a year worth of design work.

Some of the cooler features implemented in the renovations are the cold and hot tubs that are deeper than average, the larger training room equipped to hold more athletic trainers and therapists, and the large video screen in front of the locker room.

But the players are most fond of the dining area where a special culinary group comes in to cook meals that meet their dietary needs. Some of their favorites are the pasta bar before games, post-game tacos and the à la carte area where players can create a plate of their own.

These changes are all part of Phase One of the \$1 billion arena transformation and only the beginning of more renovations to come. The team hopes to be able to continue to innovate as technology evolves, tweaking the spaces and adding more changes to help players for years to come.

"I think as a whole, we're of the opinion that it's the best locker room in the entire league," Tanski says. "So now we're just trying to keep an eye on who's going to top it and how we can make sure that we've got opportunities to make tweaks over time to keep this at the forefront of what's happening in professional sports."





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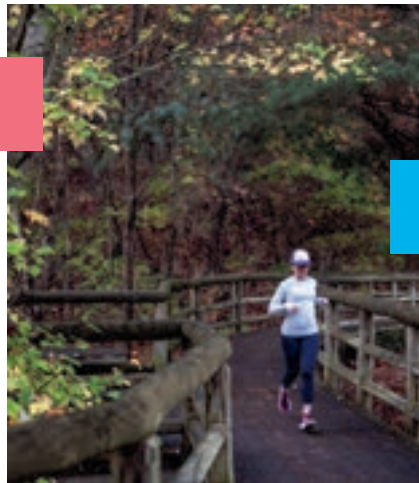
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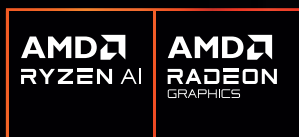
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