

# BALLERS

SPORTS + BUSINESS

MOTIVATION

FEBRUARY ISSUE

ALEXIS  
HORNBUCKLE

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LAWRENCIA  
MOTEN

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CASSIDY  
ALLEN

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KEVIN  
ABDIEL

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Collin  
Sexton

BUILT DIFFERENT



PLUS

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The Power of  
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## FEBRUARY 2021 ISSUE

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# Editor's Note

**The Ballers Magazine** is a digital magazine dedicated to shining light on amazing people in sports that are inspiring the next generation.

Through a series of in-depth, exclusive interviews, this magazine will bring you along the journey to success of the industry's most incredible athletes and business professionals. From sports to business to motivation, we are committed to sharing stories that encourage you to seek greatness. Whether you are a sports enthusiast or are looking to enter the sports industry, we are excited to provide this platform for you to connect with these sports all-stars.

Connect with us at  
**@TheBallersMagazine** on  
Instagram or send us an email,  
and let us know who you would  
like to see featured on our  
forthcoming issues.

*Sky's the limit,  
keep ballin'.*

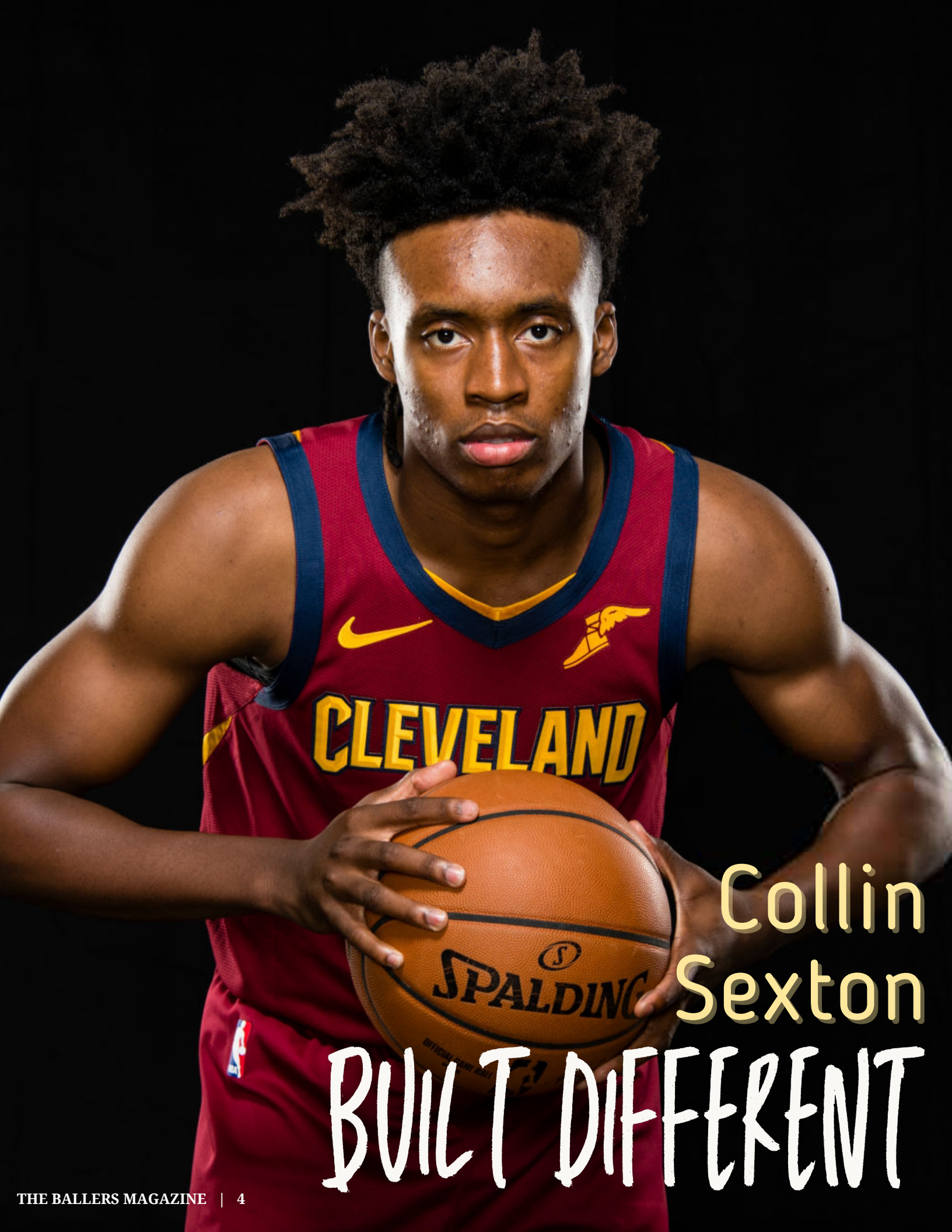
*Sofi Dumont*

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Editor-in-Chief | @sofidumont







Collin  
Sexton

BUILT DIFFERENT



Collin Sexton became immersed in the world of basketball at just three years old. Born and raised in Mableton, Georgia, Collin quickly fell in love with the game after watching his dad coach and older brother play growing up. **This was only the beginning.** As he embarked on a journey of his own, he was determined to play at the highest level and leave his mark on the game. **Little did he know, but over the next few years, he would do just that.** It wasn't all smooth sailing though. During his time in high school, Collin's talents and skills often flew under the radar. Whether it was rankings or college offers, he was underestimated. This only added fuel to his fire. Not only was he determined to prove doubters wrong, but he was eager to exceed their expectations. From winning a gold medal and the MVP Award with USA Basketball in the 2016 FIBA Under-17 World Championship to becoming a McDonald's All-American in 2017, Collin earned an array of accolades that solidified his impact on the game. After graduating from high school, Collin began his collegiate career at the University of Alabama—where he would go on to play for a year before declaring for the NBA Draft. Throughout this time, he remained locked in. He continued to work on strengthening his skills and expanding his knowledge of the game. **Before he knew it, the opportunity came and he was ready.** With the eighth pick in the 2018 NBA Draft, the Cleveland Cavaliers selected Collin. He had done it. He had achieved his childhood dreams of playing in the NBA. **He hasn't looked back since!** Collin's competitive drive and relentless pursuit of greatness have quickly turned him into a household name. Throughout the past two seasons, he has raised the bar further with his efforts on the court and personal ventures off of it. **And, it doesn't stop there.** Currently in his third year in the league, Collin is averaging 22.8 points per game and having an All-Star caliber season with the Cavs—not only becoming the first player in team history with 20+ point outings in his first 10 games of a season, but also the third-youngest and fifth-quickest Cavalier to reach 3,000 career points. Beyond the court, he continues to use his platform to give back to the next generation through basketball camps, speaking engagements, and more. Through it all, one thing remains at the forefront of Collin's pursuits—the importance of moving with a purpose. A purpose grounded in family, his love for the game, drive to achieving the unthinkable, and passion for paving the way for upcoming generations. **He is truly...BUILT DIFFERENT!**



Photographs courtesy of Collin Sexton (@collinyoungbull)





**You had an incredible high school career and earned an array of accolades there—one of which was winning a gold medal and an MVP award with USA Basketball. Could you share more with us about what that experience was like for you?**

The experience was amazing! So with USA Basketball, you have to get an invite to the camp. Once you get to the camp, you basically try out (for the team). I didn't get an invite until pretty much the last minute because I was a late bloomer. Once I got the invite and they told me I was going to be able to have a chance to be on the team, I just worked every day—sometimes three to four times a day to make sure I would make the team. I put in so many hours of work that week. Even before coming up to USA Basketball, I was working out and training (for it). I really had a passion. I wanted to make sure that I made the team, so whatever it took, I made sure I did. Once I got up there, I made the team, and a lot of people didn't expect me to—just because I wasn't the highest ranked player or this and that. But, I definitely showed what I could do and it was a great experience. That was my first time ever going overseas. We went to Spain, and just the fans over there, they love basketball. It was a great experience and I definitely want to go back there someday.

**As you embarked on that next step in your career and went to play basketball at the University of Alabama, what were some of the challenges that you faced early on? How did you work to overcome them?**

The early challenges that I had were pretty much about adjusting to college life. I had to figure it out. Just the freedom you have (in college). You have a lot more freedom, you have a lot more time to yourself. I had to adjust and pretty much make my own schedule to figure out what would work best for me, and what would help me be the best person that I could be. When I was in school, the first couple of weeks were pretty much about understanding how I could move and go about things. I think I had my (high school) graduation and left the next morning for school, so I had to adjust pretty fast to college life.

**You only played a year at Alabama before declaring for the NBA Draft. During that year though, how do you think your game elevated?**

It elevated a whole lot. I would say I got better all around. Coach Avery pushed me to be the best person that I could be, the best player that I could be. He never let me have any off days. He always was on me the hardest, and I feel like that helped me. He always held me accountable, and accountable for everyone—I was like the head of the snake. He made me want to be the leader that I can be. It helped me once I got into the NBA. Leading older guys was a little bit different, but I was able to figure it out because (of) those experiences.





**We have to talk about Draft Night! You were selected by the Cleveland Cavaliers with the 8th pick in the 2018 NBA Draft. Take us through that moment of hearing your name being called, and achieving your dreams of playing basketball at the highest level. What was that moment like?**

Oh man, it was amazing! It was a feeling that you really can't explain. It is a feeling that just shows that all of your hard work and dedication has paid off. It just shows you that dreams really come true. That night, it just showed me that dreams definitely come true as long as you put your mind to it. Also, it showed me how much all the people that were there (to share) the moment with me meant to me—my grandma, my mom, my dad, everyone was there supporting me. It just felt amazing. To see all of their faces, and to see them smiling and crying at the same time (\*laughs\*), it just felt amazing. That (moment) was pretty cool.







**During your first year in the league, what are some challenges that you faced? How did you work to push through those?**

One of them was the time—we had so much free time and so much time alone. I had to figure out what I would be doing during the daytime, and how I could make my days productive. Also, just figuring out the game (was a challenge). The game was different. It is a lot faster, guys are a lot better, and they are stronger as well. So I had to figure out what I could and could not do when I was out there, and it was an adjustment. It was rough for the first half (of my rookie season), but once I figured it out, I felt like the game started slowing down a whole lot. The coaching changes that we had was also an adjustment, and I had to adjust on the fly. I had two coaches my first year and then two coaches my second year, so four coaches within two years was kind of tough.

**Whether it is tough losses or injuries that come with the game, there are a lot of challenges along the way. Could you share your thoughts with us on the value of having that mental toughness to overcome adversity?**

Oh yeah! I had to have that mental toughness just to continue to stay confident in myself. It is easy to get down on yourself. It is easy to feel sorry for yourself. So I had to stay confident in what I could do, and just go out there and show the world. Don't think anything of it—just go out there and play. Challenges are coming, but it is about how you overcome those challenges and adversity (that matters) at the end of the day. People say, “The toughest people are those who come out stronger after something happens.” I feel like for me, I definitely came out stronger and a lot better (after facing adversity); and it showed who I am. It showed that no adversity is going to keep me down.



## **Transitioning a little bit off the court, how have you started to build your personal brand in the space?**

By just being me, to be honest. I have built (my personal brand) by showing people that there is another side of me than what they see on the court. When they see me on the court, they see passion, aggression, and the will to compete. But then off the court, I am one-eighty. I am a different person. I like to have fun, enjoy my family, talk to people—especially the younger generation. I always want to give back to them and show them that dreams do come true. I have been through many different challenges, so I want to show them that whatever challenges they are going through, they (can) overcome. So me being able to give back to the younger generations, talk to them, and let them know: “Hey, I understand. If I can overcome it, you can as well” is definitely cool. I love how I can reach so many now that I am in the NBA.

## **You also recently tapped into the design space, and launched your own bag collection with Ghurka. What was that experience of designing your own travel bags like?**

It was pretty cool! When you design something, it takes months—sometimes years—for it to come to life. I always wanted to design something. I see a lot of guys do shoes, t-shirts, clothing and fashion, but I wanted to switch it up a little bit. I am always carrying a bag—whether it is in the airport or to go the gym —, so I wanted to create a bag that could be versatile and something that could be (worn) by both younger and older generations. The Ghurka bag definitely came out pretty nice.

## **Throughout this journey, what are some of your sources of motivation or inspiration that continue to push you to keep growing and evolving?**

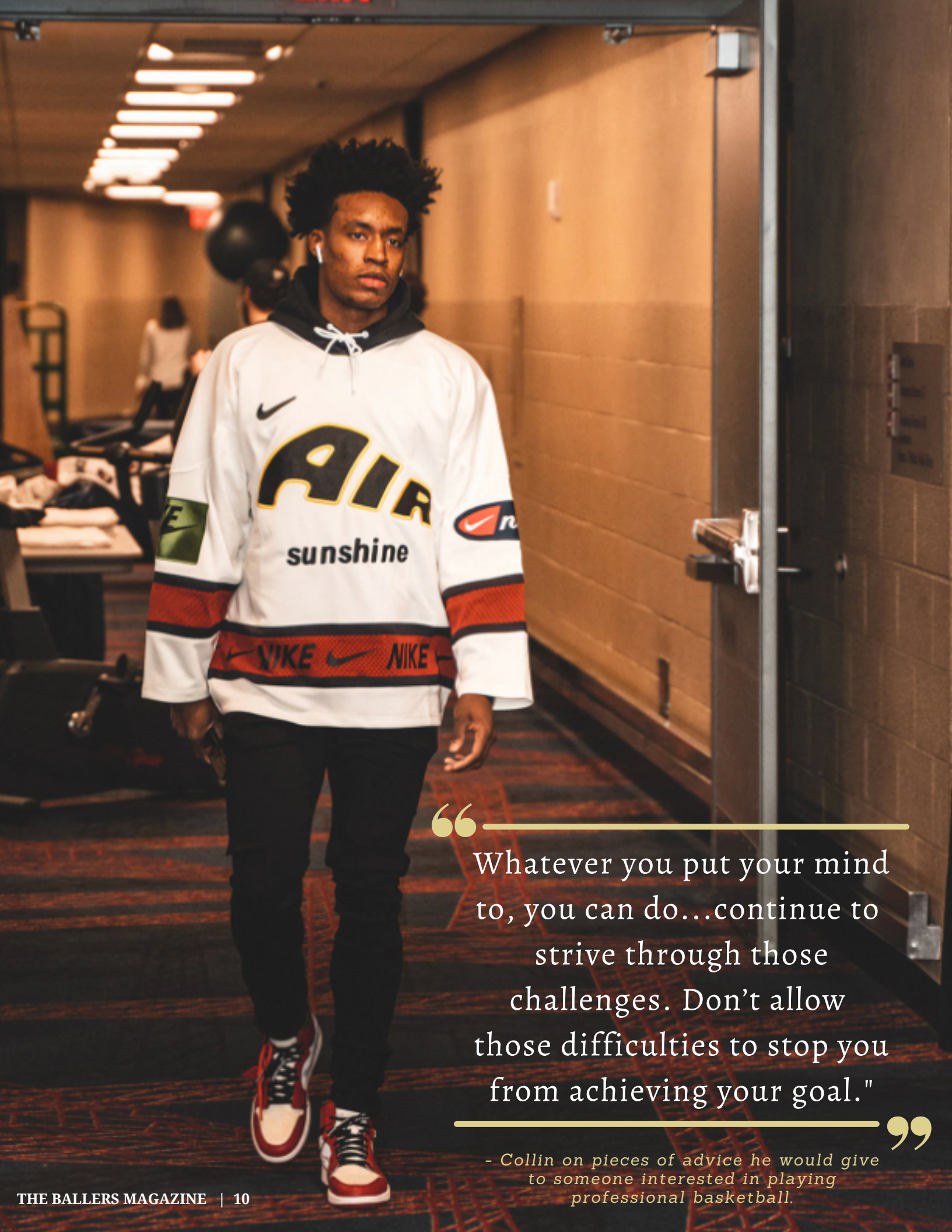
My parents and my grandmother. To see their hard work, and to see what they went through growing up (motivates me). Just to see how they used to wake up early in the morning—at three or four o’clock—to go to work and they never complained about anything, and to see how much they have sacrificed for me and my siblings drives me. It continues to push (me) on. It makes me want to continue to do better, be great for them, and show them that all their sacrifices and the things they did for me didn’t go to waste.

**"Just be patient. Everything will work itself out. Continue to stay confident through all the adversity, all the people that are talking, all the criticism. Just stay confident. Don't even worry about it, because at the end of the day, people are going to talk whether you are doing good or you are doing bad. People are always going to have something to say."**

*- Collin on a piece of advice he would give to his younger self.*







“ Whatever you put your mind to, you can do...continue to strive through those challenges. Don't allow those difficulties to stop you from achieving your goal.”

”  
- Collin on pieces of advice he would give to someone interested in playing professional basketball.





**Going into the advice side of things, what are some pieces of advice that you would give to someone who is interested in pursuing a similar career path and playing basketball at the professional level?**

I would say, "Whatever you put your mind to, you can do." At the end of the day, you can do and achieve whatever it is that you want to achieve. Also, you have to remember that nobody's path is going to be the same. So whenever you are thinking like, "Oh man this guy did this" or "Oh man he made it here," just think about that—your path is never going to be like the next person's. Everybody's paths are different. You may have a little bit more ups, they may have a little bit more downs, or (vice versa). You just have to continue to take what you are given, and continue to strive through those challenges. Don't allow those difficulties to stop you from achieving your goal.

**If you could describe yourself in three words, what would those words be and why?**

Different, respectful, and passionate. I would say different just because my style is different, how I play is different, the way that I was raised was different, everything that I have been through hasn't been the same as everyone else—it has been different. Respectful because I am always going to be respectful to others, and I want to show that I want that respect as well. Passionate because whatever I do, I am going to be passionate about it. I am going to put my all into it. Whether it is on the court or off the court, I am going to make sure that I give my all each and every time.

**Throughout our chat, you have highlighted the impact that basketball has had on your life. If you could describe it, what does basketball mean to you? Why is this game so special?**

Basketball means everything to me—this game is so special. It has taken me to so many places that I would have never gone to, or thought about going to if it weren't for basketball. It has opened so many doors for me—whether it is on the court or off the court. The game has allowed me to communicate and interact with so many people. Basketball has definitely paved the way for me, and has allowed me to be the person that I am today.





## WHAT WE DO

Help our clients take their brands to the next level while strengthening their platform in their respective industries.



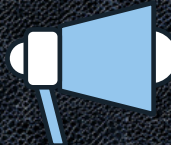
SOCIAL MEDIA  
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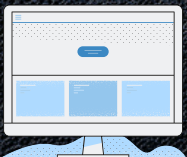
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THE BALLERS MAGAZINE PRESENTS

# THE COACHES CORNER



A new segment dedicated to highlighting coaches and trainers in the industry! These feature stories give an inside look into their journeys to coaching, passions beyond the game, and keys to success both on and off the court.





# ALEXIS HORNBUCKLE

*High School & AAU Coach |  
Retired WNBA Player*

Born and raised in Dunbar, West Virginia, Alexis Hornbuckle remembers quickly becoming interested in the game of basketball after watching her older brother play and dad coach growing up. **This was the beginning of a story that would not only take her around the world, but would also allow her to discover her life's purpose—coaching.** As she embarked on her collegiate career at the University of Tennessee, where she played under the leadership of Coach Pat Summitt, Alexis continued to expand her knowledge of the game and strengthen her skills on the court. During her time at Tennessee, Alexis not only earned an array of accolades including two NCAA Championships, but she also solidified her commitment to playing the game at the highest level. Before she knew it, the chance to turn her dreams to reality was here. With the fourth pick in the 2008 WNBA Draft, the Detroit Shock selected Alexis. She had done it. **She had achieved her childhood dream of playing basketball at the highest level.** Over the next

*Photographs courtesy of Alexis Hornbuckle (@buck1422)*

several years, Alexis would go on to become a two-time WNBA Champion and an incredible veteran of the game—playing both in the league and overseas as well. In the latter part of her career, she began to discover her true passion in the space—teaching and sharing her love for the game with others. She hasn't looked back since! Currently, Alexis coaches high school and AAU teams, and trains the next generation of young athletes who dream of one day playing the game at the highest level. **Truly inspiring!**

**Throughout your collegiate career, both on and off the court, what are some things that you learned about yourself?**

I learned that I wasn't as smart as I thought I was. I definitely learned that it takes help, and you have to be willing to ask for help. You have to continue to be humble. You have never made it—I don't care what level you are at. I know I will keep quoting Coach Summitt because she just had a tremendous impact on my life, but she would say: "You win in life with people." When I first came into the university, being from West Virginia, I always had a chip on my shoulder. It was like, "I have to prove something for my state on the women's (basketball) side." So I came in with a chip on my shoulder—one of "I have to do this" and "I...I..."—, and I learned very quickly that it is a "we" thing. Life is a "we" thing. Yes, you have to take care of yourself, your body, your mind, and your spirit. You have to take care of all of that, but at the same time, you win in life with people. That was one of the most important lessons that I learned and have kept with me.

**Take us through Draft Night! In 2008, you were selected by the Detroit Shock. What was that moment like of listening to your name be called and continuing into the world of professional basketball?**

It was humbling. All I could do was smile—I gave them that big Kool-Aid smile—ear-to-ear. My mom, my dad, my brother, my sister, and my cousins were there. Just hearing my name, standing up, hugging my parents and my family, it was just so surreal.





*Photo credit: Tennessee Athletics (@vol\_sports)*



**Looking back at that transition from college into the league, what were some of the challenges that you faced early on? How did you work to overcome them?**

Moving from college to the pros is a different speed. The game is faster. You are dealing with stronger women, you know, it is not young ladies anymore. So that was a big adjustment. I was strong, I was athletic, I had speed, I could jump, but they were smart, fast, strong—and it was an everyday thing. Every single person in that gym deserved to be there. You know, it wasn't like you had a walk-on or two—no. They were drafted, they got traded, they got picked up—these were people who had played in college, played overseas, or been playing in the WNBA for years. So you have to carry your own weight. Nobody cares that you are a rookie, they care about the value that you can bring to that team.

**In your first season, you also became a WNBA Champion. As a rookie, how did that impact the way you looked at the game? How did it motivate you moving forward?**

I was just hungry. I mean, I wanted like four rings—just like I wanted four rings in college (\*laughs\*). To be able to come off that college ring to that WNBA first-year ring I was like, “Oh I don't want to stop. I am trying to get three, four rings in a row.” It didn't play out like that, but that was my motivation.

**You also played overseas. Could you share more with us about your experience there? What were some of the key takeaways that you learned from your time abroad?**

That was actually more of a major adjustment than college to the WNBA. That European-style of play is a little slower, and they definitely call the game differently for foreigners in other countries. So learning how to play through obvious fouls, and learning how to check my attitude and emotions when things didn't go my way was key. I quickly learned to adjust how I approached my scoring and my game defensively. It was different, and if I didn't adjust to their style of play—while bringing in my own style—I wouldn't have survived for eleven years overseas.





"If your 'why' is not strong enough to keep you going on your worst days, that is probably not where your purpose, passion, or niche truly is. Find something where it is not hard to work hard for you. It is fun to work hard."

- Alexis on pieces of advice she would give to someone who is interested in playing basketball at the professional level.

**Let's talk about your journey in coaching! Where did that passion for coaching stem from? What inspired you to embark on this journey as a high school and AAU coach?**

Coach Nikki Fargas, who was my Assistant Coach at the University of Tennessee—now the Head Coach for the women's basketball team at LSU—, she actually told me when I was a player that I would end up being a coach. I was like, "Yeah, ok I hear you." But in my head I was like, "I am going to play until the wheels fall off, and then I am just going to kind of chill." That was my mindset in college—even though I would go back home, coach AAU, and help them out. The bottom line is that I love helping people in any type of way, and because my gift is rooted in basketball, what better way to give back than (through) coaching basketball. I truly believe this is my purpose—to use basketball as a vehicle to touch as many lives as I can around the world. I love it. There are not enough people just teaching the game. There are too many people trying to put money in their pockets or grab the next superstar, but what about those that aren't superstars. There is Division I, Division II, Division III, NAIA, and junior college. To play in college is an honor—you work for that, you earn that—, so I want to give everyone a chance. I dive into camps, clinics, small groups, personal lessons, speaking engagements. Anything that can make a young girl say, "Hey! I might want to try this" or "Hey! I have tried this before, I didn't like it, but let me try it again." That is what drives me.

**Give us a little bit of insight into what being a coach is like! What are some of the challenges or the adversity that one may face as a coach? How have you worked to overcome it?**

It is a whole new era. This generation is talented and smart, but they are kind of all over the place. Most of them don't understand what hard work really is. They quit. You know, they have been cuddled, everybody is telling them they are great on social media and online, and they are buying into it early instead of humbly continuing to work and believing that they are not number one. Even if you are the number one ranked player coming out of high school, it doesn't matter. You want to be ranked the number one player in the world. So until you reach that, you gotta keep grinding. You have to keep going. It is not going to be easy, and no, quitting is not an option. I feel like today, quitting is like the number one option. It gets hard, kids quit; or the parents get mad, and (the kids) quit. That is one of the things that I have had to overcome—parents actually make it more harder than the kids sometimes for coaches to really do their jobs.



**Throughout our chat, you have highlighted the impact that basketball has had on your life. If you could put it into words, what does basketball mean to you? Why is this game so special?**

Man, basketball is my first true love. I fell in love with the game because I just saw that you can put everything you have into this game, and it is going to reward you very, very well. For me, growing up where I grew up—definitely not the safest neighborhood—, (basketball) gave me the opportunity to go to college. At that time, nobody in my immediate family had been to college. So receiving that scholarship, and not just stopping there, but getting a degree and going pro (was) amazing. Just seeing people want to help me because they saw how invested I was in the sport, kept me loving the sport. Then, just being able to see if I could dominate on each and every level fueled me. In middle school, which was junior high back then, I played one year. I played in the 8th grade and we went undefeated. It was too easy and I told my dad, “Either I am going to sit out or I need to move out of the district and play at (the) high school level.” So I always had that hunger. I always loved to see how much I could win. God is good because I have literally won on every level in basketball.

**What are some pieces of advice that you would give to someone who is interested in pursuing a similar career path and playing basketball at the professional level?**

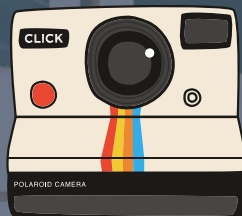
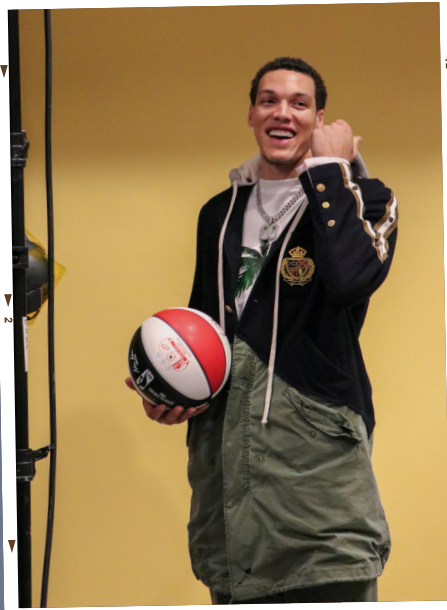
I would say, “Discover your why. Why do you want to do that? Is it because a sibling does it? Your parents want you to? People think you should because you are athletic or tall or this and that?” If your ‘why’ is not strong enough to keep you going on your worst days, that is probably not where your purpose, passion, or niche truly is. Find something where it is not hard to work hard for you. It is fun to work hard. I think that if you can do that—and you enter sports, business, coaching, and relationships with that mindset—, you are going to win in life.

**Reflecting back on your own personal journey, what is a piece of advice that you would give to your younger self and why?**

I would tell myself to: “Be quiet and listen.” I feel like I was always looking to get the last word or have answers for everything. Everything does not have an answer, and listening is a much needed, acquired skill for everyone. You have to acquire the true skill of listening. Listening does not mean you hear them talk, and you are already preparing your answer. Listening means: hear them out, take a moment, if you don’t fully understand what they are saying ask, and then respond—if it requires a response. I think that I would have learned a lot more, and would have moved a lot further, a lot quicker if I would have done that. I am not one to say, “I wish someone would have told me.” No, I wish I would have listened. Plenty of people told me, I just didn’t listen. So I would definitely say, “Be quiet and listen. Sit still, and then figure out how you need to move and how to get there. A lot of people have been there before you. A lot of people have already been in the fields—whether it is as professional athlete, an entrepreneur, or (someone) in the corporate world. Obviously there are always going to be people ahead of you. It is a time thing, it is an age thing. So listen, take that advice, and try to gain wisdom—don’t try to show how smart you are. Surround yourself with people who are smarter than you and then listen, watch, apply, and see how well that works out for you. Emulate success.”







**CAPTURING  
MOMENTS THAT  
LAST FOREVER.**



# **BALLERS**

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# CASSIDY ALLEN

## *Social & Digital Media Assistant | Atlanta Hawks*

Cassidy Allen has been surrounded by the world of sports for as long as she can remember. From playing basketball and volleyball to running track and field growing up, this Georgia native was actively involved in the space from a very young age. **It wasn't until her time in college though, where she discovered that her true passion was beyond the court.** After transferring to Kennesaw State University her sophomore year, Cassidy began to explore careers that merged her passions for creative storytelling and content creation in sports. As she reached out to different organizations and applied to an array of job positions to gain experience in sports journalism, Cassidy began having difficulty landing an internship. Despite this minor setback, she continued to push through. **She was determined to create her own path.** Soon enough, she found the perfect way to not only gain experience, but also to establish her personal brand in the industry—by starting her own YouTube sports channel interviewing college and professional athletes. **The rest is history!** From interning with Fox Sports South to working with the WNBA Atlanta Dream, Cassidy would go on to earn an array of opportunities with several

*Photographs courtesy of Cassidy Allen (@cassmilan)*

sports organizations. Currently, she continues to expand on her love for storytelling and content creation through her work with the Atlanta Hawks—as the team's Social & Digital Media Assistant—, as well as her own lifestyle blog—Feelin' the Lifestyle. **Incredible!**

### **How was that transition from college into the world of public relations and digital media in sports?**

It actually wasn't too bad—I felt prepared for it. Obviously there were little things that I may have not had exact experience with or have taken a class in, but I felt prepared from all the internships that I had and the networking I had done with people. I would say the biggest adjustment was scheduling. You know, being in college, you are kind of used to having that free will—(for instance) having a class on Tuesdays and Thursdays and being off on Mondays and Wednesdays. Once I made that transition, I was working Monday through Friday; and working in the WNBA, I was working all the time, even on the weekends. I think that scheduling (aspect) was the biggest adjustment.

### **You are currently working with the Atlanta Hawks in social/digital media. Could you share more with us about your role with the organization and your day-to-day responsibilities in this position?**

Yeah! I work in social and digital media, so basically anything that you see on any of our digital platforms—whether it is a story on our website, a tweet, an Instagram post, a Snapchat, or a TikTok—I have worked on it or somebody on my team has worked on that. It is a combination of writing copy and creating content. It really just kind of depends on what the week looks like, and it is all based on our content calendar—we built it out based on our game days and community events. It kind of all goes from there. Also pre-COVID, when we had concerts at State Farm Arena, I would photograph those. The things that stay the same day-to-day is copywriting and content strategy, but as far as the physical (activities), it really depends on the events going on that day.



**As a professional in the space, what are some qualities or characteristics that you think can help someone excel in the roles of PR/Communication and Social Media Management?**

I think the biggest thing for PR/Communication is networking. A lot of it is about trying to pitch your players, your brand, or whoever you are representing to media outlets for them to write a story, interview them, or come and cover them. Networking and expanding your contact list is a really big thing. Also, having a good relationship with whoever the player is or the subject is is important. It's hard to pitch someone if you don't know them or have a good relationship with them. Being a really good writer is key—you are going to have to write a ton of press releases, and just different types of written (content) that comes with public relations. For social media, I would say copywriting is a really big thing. I think a lot of people see social media posts and forget that there is a person behind it who has to sit there and write the copy, figure out the whole strategy of how you are going to post something, and how you are going to create the content. I think copywriting is probably the biggest thing, and then being versatile with content creation. Having basic video editing skills, and being able to navigate around Photoshop is great. For a lot of jobs, companies will either have a graphic design team that will make templates for you—so you will need to be able to work around and update things—, or (they) will want you to create graphics from scratch. Also, being able to collaborate really well with people is important. When you are working on a social team, you are going to be bouncing ideas off of other people and having to get things done in a short amount of time while working together with others. In total, I would say copywriting, content creation skills—video editing, photography, and graphic design—, and collaborating well in groups are important skills when working (in) social media.



**Let's talk branding! How did you get started building your personal brand in the space?**

When I got my first internship in college with Fox Sports South, I started putting my work out there. I realized the importance of social media in the space that we are in—your social media is like your digital resume. You know, if someone were to stumble upon my page and see that I had interned at Fox Sports South—and they have an opening at a (similar company)—, they have already seen my work. It is just one less thing I have to worry about when applying for a job. I think I hopped on that curve early—this was almost like six years ago. Now, you see people promote their work all the time on social media if they work in the digital field.





**Going into the advice side of things, what are some pieces of advice that you would give to someone who is interested in pursuing a similar career path in the industry?**

I would break it down into a few things. First piece of advice would be to get as much experience as you can. Whether it is interning at different places or creating your own platforms and content, just make yourself as well rounded as you can. In this digital sports space, it is not just social media. It is social media, marketing, content creation, writing, pitching, and collaborating. As much as you can, hone your craft and become the best that you can in your niche. So if you are a really good video editor, claim yourself as a video editor. If you are really good at writing and strategy, do that. Experience is the biggest thing, and if you can't get it through an internship, create it yourself—create a blog, create a YouTube channel, (etc). The next thing I would say is networking. I think a lot of people coming in don't realize that sometimes it is more about who you know than what you know. You can be the most qualified candidate for someone, but if someone internal recommends somebody, it is an easier process. So networking and making genuine connections is key. It is not just about connecting with people on LinkedIn and thinking that is it. You can get on a Zoom (call) or a phone call, really make genuine connections, and then stay in touch. The last thing I would say is to leave no stone unturned. In this field, it can be really discouraging to apply to something and five thousand other people have applied (as well). But, you just can't give up. If this is something that you want to do, you just have to set a goal for yourself. You can't give up. You have to keep going. You will get your "yes" at some point, but just have to be persistent.



**You also started your own lifestyle blog called Feelin' the Lifestyle. Could you share more with us about what inspired you to embark on this journey?**

Yeah! I have always loved writing—I am a writer at my core. I did a lot of freelance writing when I was in college as well as when I was out of college, and I wanted to start getting back into it while working with the Hawks. You know, just something on the side that I was doing. I am sure you know about this, but the whole pitching process to big media companies is very draining. A lot of times, I would pitch an idea to a brand, wouldn't hear back from them, and then they would use it. There are just so many horror stories like that. So I was like, "Why don't I just make my own platform (where) I can write about what I want, when I want, and control it? It doesn't have to be a big deal where I am worried about getting paid. I can just do this for myself and for fun, and if money comes, then that is cool." I really love writing, and I love to go to different restaurants and places and share it with my friends. For me it was like, "Why don't I just make a blog, put all my experiences of eating, traveling, and discovering new things (there), and share it with people?"

**That's awesome! Throughout this journey of working in sports as well as starting your own lifestyle blog, what are some things that you have learned about yourself?**

With the blog, I have learned that the only thing stopping you is you. For a long time I was like, "Oh, I will just wait until someone reaches out to me" or "I will wait until I hear back from someone." But it was like, "What if that never happens?" I would be sitting on all of these ideas that I had, and the only thing that was stopping me from doing it was myself. I think that is one thing that I realized—if I want to do something, I am more than capable of doing it. I just can't let myself be the one to get in the way and stop myself. With working with the Hawks and in sports, I have learned that I am resilient. In the role, you know since COVID, things have changed a lot. The best part of my job is being at the games, traveling with the team, and all that stuff; and things have changed. It is definitely difficult. It is not the same, but I have found a way to push through, adjust, adapt, and change how I am thinking about creating some type of content. I already knew this about myself, but (these experiences) really reassured me that I can conquer anything, push through any situation, and still thrive in it.

**"“Do not compare yourself to other people's journeys.” I think knowing who you are, what you are capable of, and that the journey that God has for you is for you is important. It is almost about having blinders on and just focusing on what you have for you.”**

*- Cassidy on a piece of advice she would give to her younger self.*





# KEVIN ABDIEL

**Senior Graphic Designer & Photographer | Miami Hurricanes**



*Photographs courtesy of Kevin Abdiel (@a.dobleo)*

**Take us through that journey early on. How was that transition from college into the world of graphic design and content creation in sports?**

It was an interesting experience for me. In college, we never really did anything with sports—none of my projects involved sports because our professors were adamant about doing more agency work. With that, it led to a very different experience, but it did teach me that “where there is a will, there is a way.” When you want to work in something, you will find the time to create the projects on your own. So even though I did not have a ton of projects (with sports) in college, I would grab my computer and make sports stuff every time I could. I think that led to me being able to build out a pretty nice portfolio. Honestly though, if I would not have taken the time to do the sports designs on my own, I don’t know if I would be on the same journey. Like I said, college was very “agency world”—where I was making decks, using a lot of InDesign, etc.

For Kevin Abdiel, pursuing a career in sports was a dream of his from a very young age. Born and raised in Puerto Rico (PR), Kevin remembers creating content for sporting events and designing graphics for college athletes growing up. **This was only the beginning.** Little did he know, but in just a few years, he was going to be immersed in the world of sports media. After graduating from college with a degree in graphic design, Kevin decided to apply for a graphic design position at Iowa State University—a decision that would not only allow him to achieve his dreams of working in sports full-time, but would also connect him to an incredible network of creatives outside of PR. During his time at Iowa State Athletics, Kevin continued to elevate his knowledge in graphic design and confirm his commitment to tapping into different forms of visual storytelling. After two seasons, he embarked on a new journey at the University of Auburn as a Creative Services Specialist—where he also began to explore the world of sports photography. **It has been a movie ever since!** Currently, Kevin is working with the Miami Hurricanes as a Senior Graphic Designer, and continues to raise the bar in sports storytelling through his eye-catching photography and designs.

**“Practice is one of the biggest things in this industry. The reps you get are key. There are plenty of opportunities out there to practice. A lot of people are aiming for the home run, but sometimes you just gotta settle for the single. It happens—you settle for the single, but that is considered practice. Then you know, next time up, you are going to want to swing even harder.”**

*- Kevin on pieces of advice he would give to someone interested in pursuing a similar career path.*



**As you embarked on your professional graphic design career at Iowa State University, what were some challenges that you faced early on? How did you work to overcome them?**

First of all, it was my actual first full-time job in design. So the pressure that I put on myself of wanting to be good and wanting to be worth it for them was one of the biggest challenges. Not only was I moving away from my family—my whole family is in Puerto Rico and I am the only one in Iowa—, but I was also leaving everything I knew behind to start something new. Mentally, when you are having bad days, that is when it can take a toll. On the good days, we are all good; but when the going gets tough, that is when you are like, “Man, I miss my family.” So that was another challenge. Even getting used to the culture—in the sense of English not being my first language, and going from always speaking Spanish to now everything was in English. I am grateful I know English, but it was also a challenge because I think in Spanish. So sometimes I got my words mixed up, and when you don’t really know what the job entails, it can become a lot. For someone like me, who is very face-to-face about having conversations and making sure that everything is clear, (it) was difficult. With English not being my first language, sometimes it could get rough. That was a pretty big challenge, but fortunately I had great co-workers and a great boss that guided me through it.

**Let’s talk about branding! You are not only in graphic design, but you also have experience in photography and social media. How did you get started building your personal brand in the space?**

A lot of trial and error, honestly. While I was at Iowa State, I noticed that Twitter was a pretty big thing. When I started making graphics for our social channels and posting them, that is when I took Twitter seriously and was like, “I am going to start posting more of my work.” Before, I would post random things. But then I started to see, “Hey people use this as a professional platform to help them grow.” When I realized that social media has a lot of good power, I started taking it a little bit more seriously. I started posting my work, fortunately people liked it, and that helped me grow. Then, I got an opportunity while I was at Auburn (University) to dive deeper into photography. I was no expert, but like I said, it’s all about trial and error. I am trying to learn as much as I can because ultimately I don’t want to just be known as a graphic designer. I want people to be able to count on me for different things, and help myself feel like I am helping people out in different ways other than just making a graphic.







**You are currently with the University of Miami, but have previously worked with Iowa State University and Auburn University as well. Looking back, what are some skills and characteristics that you think can help someone excel in the industry?**

Good communication skills are a huge plus. Being able to communicate effectively with all of the “clients” you are dealing with (is important). You could be an army of one in some college departments or you could be part of a bigger creative group, but (regardless), you still need to be able to communicate effectively with whoever you are doing the project for. Also, having a certain drive is a characteristic that can help (someone excel). Unfortunately, there are a lot of very long days in this industry. I only say unfortunately because sometimes you do get worn out, it just happens. But when you have a passion and a certain drive for what you are doing, those days tend to feel a little less like work and more as days where you are having fun. I would say those two things are very important—communication and drive.

**Throughout this journey, what are some things that you have learned about yourself as you have tapped into different areas within the industry?**

I would say, I consider myself to be pretty persistent—I didn’t know that about me. I am not going to lie, when I was younger, I was more of a Debbie Downer. I had that mindset of: “I am never going to make it. I am never going to do this, I am never going to do that.” I think the more I have grown in the industry, the more persistent I have become in telling myself that I can do it. I can get there. In a sense, I am trying to pave a path for people that come from where I come from—from Puerto Rico. The United States has 50 states all full of talent, so a kid coming here from the island is a big move for me. I am trying to pave that path for others. I have noticed that I am persistent in that—I want to be successful, and I want to make sure that whatever we put out is good. I have also noticed that I can fit into places. Every state that I have lived (in) is just so different. Being able to get into that mold and fit in though has helped me grow, and understand what I want in life and what I don’t.



**Going into the advice side of things, what are some pieces of advice that you would give to someone who is interested in pursuing a similar career path and going into photography, graphic design, or social media management within the sports industry?**

A couple would be: practice and networking. Practice is one of the biggest things in this industry. The reps you get are key. There are plenty of opportunities out there to practice. A lot of people are aiming for the home run, but sometimes you just gotta settle for the single. It happens—you settle for the single, but that is considered practice. Then you know, next time up, you are going to want to swing even harder. So I think it is important to understand what you have available and make the best out of that, versus trying to do a whole lot with little. Also, networking and making connections. Networking is key in this industry, but it is networking in the right way. It is not about sending a message like, "Hey, how can I get your job?" That to me isn't networking. (Instead) ask something like, "Hey, how was your journey to get to your job? What things do you think are important to get to a job like the one you have? What was your career path like?" Rather than just asking about their jobs and how to get it, get to know a little bit more about the person. A genuine conversation goes a lot further than a random message.

**Reflecting back on your own personal journey, what is a piece of advice that you would give to your younger self and why?**

My advice would be: "Shoot your shot and don't be afraid." For the longest time, I saw jobs but I never really considered myself to be talented enough to apply for them. I think that is one misconception in this industry—people think you need to be the most talented (individual) in the world. A lot of times, I much rather work with someone that has a really good attitude over the talent. The talent will come as you continue to practice and learn. So I would tell my younger self, "Get a good attitude, (lift) your head up, practice, and shoot your shot. Just go for it. You never know what opportunities can lead out of it. Maybe you don't get the job, but maybe they like your interview or they like you as a person, and that can lead to something else down the line."



**"The game of basketball is essentially everything (to me)—that is where I started. I started making graphics for basketball games at colleges back home, and it gave me the opportunity to work with some of the biggest basketball programs. It has helped me so much. I am not a Division I college athlete, but the fact that I can go to a basketball court, get a couple of jump shots in, and feel way better mentally, that just tells me all I need to know about the (game) of basketball. It is a safe zone for me."**

*- Kevin on what basketball means to him and why the game is so special.*



THE BALLERS MAGAZINE PRESENTS

# THE SPOTLIGHT SERIES

A new segment dedicated to highlighting sports professionals that are up next! These feature stories give an inside look into the transition of athletes, creatives, and business professionals to the next level of their careers.





## SPOTLIGHT SERIES

# LAWRENCIA MOTEN

Lawrencia Moten knew she wanted to pursue a career in sports for as long as she can remember. From her dad playing basketball in the NBA to her own personal journey in the game, she was surrounded by the world of basketball growing up. As Lawrencia embarked on her collegiate basketball career at the University of Buffalo, she was determined to merge her love for sports with her passion for storytelling. Before she knew it, she had discovered a space that kept her close to the game while highlighting the stories of fellow athletes—sports broadcasting and journalism. **It was**

**only up from there!** After transferring to the University of Hartford for her junior and senior year, she continued to foster her own path in the industry. From interviewing her coaches and teammates to working as a color analyst for the men's and women's lacrosse teams, Lawrencia continued to strengthen her skills and solidify her commitment to pursuing a career in broadcast journalism. **She hasn't looked back since.** Currently, Lawrencia is the Digital Media and Journalism Graduate Assistant within the athletics department at the University of Lynchburg. In addition to this, she continues to foster her personal brand through her freelance journalism work—with organizations such as Beautiful Ballers and Overseas Connection—, and her entrepreneurial ventures with her company, LNCM The Brand. **Simply amazing!**



## SPOTLIGHT SERIES - LAWRENCIA MOTEN

**Take us through that next step—you have now graduated from college, are currently working as a graduate assistant, and are also building your personal brand in the space. What are some challenges that you have faced? How have you worked to overcome them?**

Right now, scheduling is a challenge in and of itself. This is a Division II school in the ODAC conference, so they are under their own kind of leadership. Every sport this spring is going on, so my schedule right now is crazy. So once again, finding the time to focus on my own work (has) been challenging. My supervisor is super encouraging (though). We have a podcast here called “The Hive Podcast,” and he let’s me interview athletes and really take charge of that. I am actually the commentator and color analyst here for the women’s basketball team (as well), so he is really awesome about making sure I am getting the experience that I need in the field. Just finding the time to gain that experience has been key.



*Photographs courtesy of Lawrencia Moten (@ayee\_lala)*

**Let’s dive into your personal brand! How did you get started building your brand in the space?**

Yeah! I think I first realized that I loved commenting when I watched my dad coach. My dad played five years in the NBA, so by the time that I was around six (years old), he was overseas and it was way different. But he was coaching for a premier basketball league team, and I remember being in the stands with my mom and seeing the commentators. I remember I asked my mom, “Why aren’t there any girls at the media table?” I was so intrigued with them and just the way that they would move—from passing out stat sheets to writing down notes to talking with the headphones on, it was just a different game that was going on back there. I was so intrigued by that—more so than the game. That is when I knew that this was something that I truly wanted to do, but I just didn’t know how to go about it. I feel like that is when I started building my own personal brand. What I knew is that I had a good amount of followers on Instagram, and then I started to realize that I could parlay my followers into potential fans. I just started thinking about different ways (to do that). The “Howie Doin’” show that I did at Hartford was a big help. I would post those videos on Instagram and everyone would love them. I just kept doing that. Now working for Beautiful Ballers, it has definitely helped because they are solely an Instagram platform. But that has been the biggest thing with building my brand—just making sure that I stay active and that my work is cohesive. I have a website, a portfolio, and a LinkedIn, but I think the biggest thing that has helped me are my social media platforms.

**In addition to you building your brand within the sports industry, you also have a lot of entrepreneurial efforts with your lash and popcorn brand. How did you get started with these projects and what was the inspiration behind the ventures?**

Yes! I am so happy you brought that up. Well, LNCM are both mine and my sister’s initials. When I wanted to start the brand, I knew it had to be something that was cohesive for the both of us. I started my lash brand because it just fit my whole beautiful baller brand (since) I would wear lashes while playing basketball. Oftentimes, people like to put you in a box. I would get the comments of, “You look like you play volleyball” or “You look like you play tennis.” They have a whole idea of what they think a basketball player should look like, and to some people, I didn’t fit that. I wanted to change that narrative. So the lashes that I would wear were the regular lashes, you know the regular brands from the store, but I just didn’t like them. My mom and I were sitting one day and she had mentioned the fact that one of her friends had created a prototype of a lip gloss. I thought in my head, “Why don’t I do that for lashes?” I ended up sending a prototype of the lashes that I would make for myself to a wholesale factory in China. It took about four months for them to create it and send it back. When I got the lashes back, I was in awe. They literally took the same type of lash (design) that I had made, and just made multiple samples of them. From there, I made the website myself, started it, and it just grew. Then (for the other brand), my sister is a foodie and she actually created this popcorn. She goes to Morgan State University and started selling them on campus. Everyone started to love it. I was like, “Wait, let’s put this on the website so it can be more than just Morgan State students.” Now, we ship it online and other people can buy it (as well). The literal amount of support that we have gotten from popcorn is just amazing—I never knew that popcorn was so popular (\*laughs\*)—, but it is awesome. We are just going to be adding more stuff. This is my brand and these are the things that I like, and I wanted my site to be (a reflection of) the things that I genuinely do use and eat. It has been great.





**Throughout our chat you have touched on the mental strength that you have maintained during this journey—whether it was as an athlete or business professional in sports. Could you share your thoughts on the importance of having that mental toughness and resilience to overcome the challenges that one may face along the way?**

Definitely! Without mental toughness, the battle is already lost. I feel like personally for me, having that strong support (system) has been key. I have a great family who is continuously supportive of me—whether it is with basketball, broadcasting, or my business—, and I have been able to lean on them when I didn't have the answers myself. I think the biggest thing that I was able to do to stay mentally tough was pray. Something that is very therapeutic to me is understanding that it is not all in my hands—as long I have done the work, I can just release it. Also understanding that what is for you is for you, and that everything happens for a reason (has) been important.





**Going into the advice side of things, what are some pieces of advice that you would give to someone who is interested in pursuing a similar career path in sports broadcasting, journalism, and color commentating?**

I think the biggest piece of advice that I would give them is to practice as much as you can, and to never feel like you have too much on your plate. Oftentimes, it felt like maybe I was doing too much and spreading myself too thin. But then, I think if I didn't spread myself as thin as I did and get involved in so many different things, I wouldn't be where I am today. It is very important to reach out to people and try everything—even if you are not familiar with something. You have to just try. If this is what you want to do, you are going to learn how to do it. Especially when you are an athlete, you can get caught up in the world of: "Oh, I don't have the time" or "I could be doing something else with my time." It really takes you sitting back, and deciding what your end goal is. If your end goal is to be a broadcaster, then you need to have experience in this field. Practice makes perfect. Where I was in sideline reporting a year ago is nowhere near where I am (at) today, and nowhere near where I am going to be in a few months. Practice makes

perfect in this field—it is not something you can be good at without actually doing it. Even if you don't have a communications department (at your university) or you don't have a big platform that wants you to work for them, do it on your own. Make a separate Instagram and talk about something that you find to be important to you. Another big piece (of advice) is to do your research. Even if you are not interviewing LeBron James, really do your research and ask the right questions. People can tell, especially when you are an athlete, when someone has truly done their research on you and cares about what you are saying. It matters, and that carries over in the long-run.

**Reflecting back on your own personal journey, what is a piece of advice that you would give to your younger self and why?**

That's a good question! The biggest piece of advice would be: "Everything is going to be okay." I tore my ACL (the) summer of my junior year, so I didn't play at all my senior year. A lot of the schools that were offering me (a scholarship) wanted to see how I would come back in a year. I had lost a star on ESPN, and I thought that was the biggest thing in the world. It was just a lot going on for me, and I wasn't sure if it was going to be okay at times honestly—or my idea of okay. So I would just tell myself, "Relax. Everything will fall into place if you do the work. Do what you are going to do, do the work, and then release it. At that point, it is out of your hands."







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whole staircase,  
just take the  
first step."

MARTIN LUTHER KING

- ☒ ***BELIEVE***
- ☒ ***IMPLEMENT***
- ☒ ***ACHIEVE***

Write down one goal you want to achieve in the next 30 days. What are some habits that you will begin to implement to reach this goal? Read this paragraph daily. You got this!

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EMBRACE THE JOURNEY, AND REMAIN:**

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