

# BALLERS

SPORTS + BUSINESS MOTIVATION

JANUARY ISSUE

LYDIA  
RIVERS

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TERRELL  
COBURN

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ZOFEEA  
GENOTA

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ROB  
LORENZO

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**PLUS**

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TIFFANY  
MITCHELL  
SHE'S ALL IN.



# JANUARY 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.

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and let us know who you would  
like to see featured on our  
forthcoming issues.

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

*Sofi Dumont*

SOFI DUMONT  
Editor-in-Chief | @sofidumont





**TIFFANY  
MITCHELL**  
*SHE'S ALL IN.*

Born and raised in Charlotte, North Carolina, Tiffany Mitchell became immersed in the world of basketball at just seven years old. After watching her older brother play a variety of sports growing up, she was determined to embark on a journey of her own in the game. From playing in an all-boys team until she was 10 years old to becoming the top player in her division in 7th grade, Tiffany was committed to pursuing her dreams of playing basketball at the highest level since a very young age. It was during her time in high school though, where she would not only connect with one of her childhood idols, but would also receive the opportunity to play at one of the top college basketball programs in the country. During her time in 10th grade, Dawn Staley—an American basketball Hall of Famer and Head Coach at the University South Carolina—began recruiting her. From watching Coach Staley play in the WNBA with the Charlotte Sting growing up to witnessing her incredible intellect on the game of basketball, Tiffany was ecstatic at the opportunity to play for her in college. As she graduated from high school and began her collegiate career at South Carolina, Tiffany solidified her commitment to playing the game at the highest level. **It was only up from there!** Throughout her college career, Tiffany earned an array of accolades on the court while continuing to work towards achieving her childhood dreams of playing in the WNBA. Before she knew it, the opportunity came and she was ready. With the 9th pick in the 2016 WNBA Draft, the Indiana Fever selected Tiffany. She had done it. She had achieved her dreams of playing basketball at the highest level. **The rest is history!** Throughout the past five seasons, Tiffany has continued to elevate her game on the court and leave her mark on the game. In addition to playing in the WNBA and overseas, Tiffany has also started her own nonprofit called S.P.I.N. Haven—an organization dedicated to providing single parents in need with resources and opportunities. Whether she is playing on the court, mentoring young kids, or giving back to the community, Tiffany is determined to use her platform to pay it forward and pave the way for the next generation. **She is...ALL IN!**



*Photographs courtesy of Tiffany Mitchell (@tiffmitch25)*



**Reflecting back on your time at the University of South Carolina, how do you think your game elevated? What are some areas that prepared you for the next level in your career?**

My game has always had that athletic, can-get-to-the-rim side (to it). To get to the professional level (though), even to be at the top of the college level, I had to be a more consistent jump shooter. I just had to add stuff to my game to elevate. I expanded my game with the three-point shot—that (allowed me) to both get to the rim and shoot the three. Even now professionally, adding the mid-range, knowing when to pass the ball, reading certain defenses and ball screens, and just being more knowledgeable of the game (has) helped me improve my own game. I always thought there was only one way to play—playing fast. But then, there were people faster than me and stronger than me on the court. So, I had to figure out ways to still elevate my game knowing that I will not always be the best person on the court.

**Now, we have to talk about Draft Night. You were drafted with the 9th pick in the 2016 WNBA Draft by the Indiana Fever. Could you share with us what that experience was like for you?**

Definitely nerve-racking. Like I said, (because of injury), I didn't even start playing the same way or better than how I was my junior year until the last month of my college season. I would have games where I had six points. I would have games where I had twenty-six points. My senior season was just very inconsistent. For me, the type of player that I am, I pride myself on being efficient and not having to shoot the ball thirty times to have thirty points. I wanted to do everything—shoot, rebound, assist. I wanted to contribute in all areas of the game. Physically, I was not capable of doing that my senior year. We lost early (as well), so once the season ended, my mind was all over the place. I was like, "I don't know if WNBA teams are going to think I am healthy enough to play. Maybe they don't think I am good enough anymore." You know, just all of these thoughts. I was also the only one from my senior class to get drafted, so all eyes were on me. It was like, "Let's see where Tiffany is going to go." I saw my name on draft boards and saw that I would either be picked third through twelfth. I was like, "Dang, I don't know where I am going to go. I have the possibility to go anywhere in the first round and anywhere in the second round." So (during) Draft Night, I was just sitting there waiting. Once one through five went, I was getting nervous and my anxiety was through the roof. Finally, when the 9th pick came, my name was called. I was just shocked and a big sigh of relief came out. My legs were shaking walking to the stage to meet the commissioner to get my jersey. It felt like the longest walk of my life (\*laughs\*). Afterwards, I was all smiles. I was so happy. Being called in the WNBA Draft is a blessing—from the first to the last pick. I am super thankful that Indiana took a chance on me.

**How was that transition from college into the world of professional basketball like for you? What were some challenges that you faced early on and how did you work to overcome them?**

It was an adjustment at first. My rookie year, I had a lot of good vets around me (though). I was the youngest on the team by probably three or four years, so I had a lot of people in front of me that I could watch and listen to to kind of make my transition a little easier. The biggest adjustment was probably the pace—just picking up on plays, the terminology, and how the Indiana system was. I was so used to being under Coach Staley for four years, and was just used to doing things a certain way. I had to retrain my mind, and just let my brain and my feet catch up to each other. Normalizing the pace was definitely a huge adjustment for me. I was trying to play at one speed and that definitely was not working when I was a professional—because at that point everybody is fast, good, and strong. So I definitely had to take a step back, look (at), and read the game from a different viewpoint than I think I was during college.

**Throughout this journey in the WNBA and overseas, what are some sources of motivation that keep you focused as you continue to grow and evolve in the game?**

I would describe myself as a perfectionist. I always feel like there is something I could be doing better, and always have different goals that I create (along the way). For me, I honestly don't think about all of the accolades. I don't even remember half of them until somebody tells me. I am always worried about the next thing, I am never satisfied. I think those two things definitely describe (my motivation)—never satisfied. I always feel like I can do more, I am capable of doing more, and I can always get better. I am always striving to be the best no matter what. Even if it may seem far-fetched, in my mind it is not—that (mentality) is something that wakes me up every day and keeps me going. I know that I am not the best. I know that there are people out there that are doing exactly what I am doing to try to be the best. So I don't want to fall victim to being comfortable just because I have accomplished this or that. Outside of myself, helping my team win keeps me focused. Indiana hasn't been in the playoffs since my rookie year, so that is another goal of mine—bringing that confidence and winning mindset back to Indiana.

"Just to be patient. You have to be open to different experiences, different cultures, and different people. Embrace the opportunities that you do have overseas, and make the most out of those experiences."

*- Tiffany on lessons she has learned throughout her time playing overseas that she would share with others.*





**Let's talk about your nonprofit—S.P.I.N. Haven! How did you get started with the organization? Could you share more with us about its mission?**

S.P.I.N. Haven is the acronym for “Single Parents in Need.” I had the idea (for this nonprofit) probably a year or two ago, but never really acted on it. It has always been something that I have been passionate about because I am a product of a single-parent home. My mother raised my brother and myself, by herself—my dad was not in my life a lot. So I saw my mom raise two kids on her own, literally. She was in school—she has two master’s degrees—and did everything. She was superwoman. I always wanted to give back to others once I got to a position (where) I could. This foundation is for people that need the help. My mom was able to hold it down by herself and raise two kids, but some parents don’t have as much opportunity and resources in place for them to raise their kids. I want to put those opportunities and resources in front of them, and that is what this foundation is all about. I am very passionate about this. I know there are so many times when people want the help, but they just don’t want to ask for it. So I want to do my part and pay (it) forward.

**That’s awesome! As you embark on this journey with your nonprofit, what are some projects and goals that you have for the organization?**

Yeah! So we just finished up my first event where we paired up with a foster care in Charlotte. We donated clothes, shoes, game systems, and just anything that the girls needed in the foster home for Christmas and just other basic necessities. My mom helped me arrange everything because I am overseas, and she went and dropped them off. Just to see my mom telling me about it, and to hear their excitement when I was talking to them on the phone was amazing. Different things that we will do along the way will be more specific to children and the actual parent. (From) reaching out to them and figuring out what they may need (to) having networking opportunities, I am going to try to put different resources in place to help them.

**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?**

Basketball means a lot. It has been a part of my entire life. Outside of the game, it has taught me so much more about life—how to deal with people, how to deal with certain situations, etc. There are certain doors that would not have opened for me if I didn't play basketball. Now, I am in a position where basketball is just a sport that I play, it is not who I am. I am definitely glad that I am able to use my platform for something bigger than just running up and down the court. That is how it started and how I thought about it in the beginning, but I know (now) that if I leave this Earth only being a basketball player I have failed. That is not what I want to do. I want to leave a legacy that is bigger than just running up and down the basketball court.



**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, “Take one day at a time.” It’s easy to get overwhelmed. It’s easy to listen to different people and get discouraged sometimes, but I feel like the mental side (is key). If you know that you really want to pursue something and get it done, don’t let anything stop you from that if it is your ultimate goal. Just take it one day at a time, one obstacle at a time. Try to compartmentalize everything and not get overwhelmed. Also, attitude—not getting too high in the highs and low in the lows. That is the best way to approach and navigate through certain ups and downs of (the) game and life.

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

That’s a good question. When I was young, I turned into a competitor very soon and I was a terrible loser. It would ruin my whole day. I wouldn’t talk to anybody, I was upset with everybody, and I was just a terrible loser—and that is a gift and a curse. At that age, it was not that serious. (For instance), I would play against my brother one-on-one all the time—he was bigger than me, stronger than me, and older than me—, and still in my head I felt like I should have been winning. I would say that now, I would have just embraced the process a little more and had fun being a kid. I turned into such a competitor so early on (that) I kind of lost the fun of the game when I was younger because I just wanted to win so bad. But honestly, I think that helped set me apart from other kids. For me, it was not just a game—it was what I wanted to do with my life. I think now that I look back I would definitely say, “Have more fun with it and enjoy the process more.”



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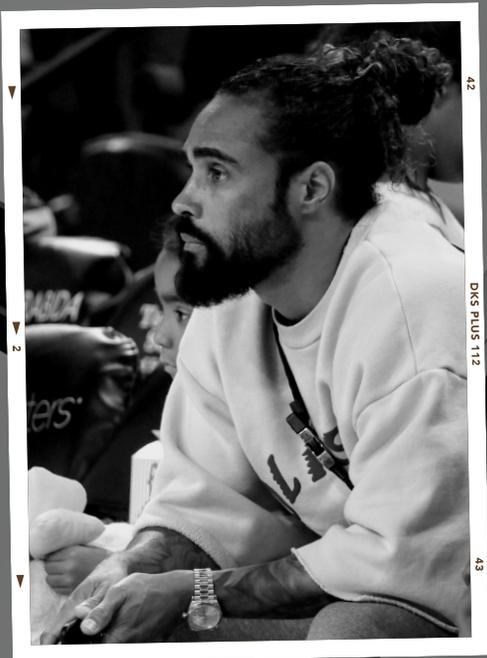
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**CAPTURING  
MOMENTS THAT  
LAST FOREVER.**

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.



*Photographs courtesy of Terrell Coburn (@coach\_coburn)*

# TERRELL COBURN

***Assistant Coach | Wagner College  
Women's Basketball***

Coach Terrell Coburn has been passionate about basketball for as long as he can remember. For this Chicago, Illinois native, an interest in coaching quickly emerged during his time at the University of Central Arkansas. After taking a basketball coaching elective his senior year, Coach Coburn became fascinated with the opportunity to teach, mentor, and guide players throughout their journeys in the game. **He hasn't looked back since!** Shortly after graduating, he embarked on a journey of his own as the Director of Player Development for the women's basketball team at Central Arkansas. From scouting to training to team travel, he contributed to the success of players in an array of ways both on and off the court. After two seasons with the team, Coach Coburn joined the women's basketball coaching staff at LIU Brooklyn—where he

would go on to coach for five years. Throughout that time, Coach Coburn not only strengthened his knowledge on the worlds of recruiting, scouting, and training, but he also solidified his commitment to helping young players reach their highest potential—a mission that he has kept top of mind throughout his coaching career. Currently, Coach Coburn is in his fifth season as the Assistant Coach of the women's basketball team at Wagner College. He is looking forward to being of service to young athletes and continuing to teach the game of basketball to others, while also giving back to communities through his nonprofit organization—the "Terrell HOOP" Foundation.

**Let's talk about that transition from working as a graduate assistant in college to being a full-time assistant coach. What was the biggest challenge that you faced early on?**

I would say the biggest challenge was just the recruiting (aspect)—the relationships that come behind recruiting. You have to build the rapport. People have to believe that you know what you are doing, and that you know how to evaluate those things. I didn't have a problem with building the relationships at all. The challenge was just people knowing who you are. Once they do, you find your way through recruiting. When I was at LIU Brooklyn, one thing I loved about Gail Striegler is that she let me be myself. So (in that transition) from working as a grad assistant to being a full-time assistant coach, the biggest challenge was just getting out there. I didn't have any experience or relationships in the recruiting game. At the end of the day, you have to bring the right players to your head coach that fit his or her vision. For me, that was the biggest challenge my first year going from one role to another. Once I was able to go to tournaments, meet people, show my face, and build those genuine relationships (though), I was able to overcome that (challenge) in a short amount of time.



**Throughout your time at Wagner College, the team has achieved an array of accolades and the program has continued to elevate season after season. As you enter your fifth season, could you share more with us about what this experience has been like?**

Absolutely! This experience at Wagner has really shown me my character of being able to persevere through adversity, and start from the bottom and work your way back up. When things didn't pan out at LIU (Brooklyn) and we were let go, I had to reevaluate where I wanted to be in my career. I had to reevaluate where I wanted to be with my work, and how I wanted to continue to impact people and be of service to them using the game of basketball. So going to Wagner, I had to show people who Terrell was, not who Coach Coburn is, but who Terrell is. I was able to do that. When I got to Wagner, I had generated and built so many genuine relationships that people wanted to be there and help me—in the sense of working my way back up. That first year, we were not good at all. I remember we only played with six players the whole year. What had to happen at that time was building that foundation. When we say foundation, we mean a culture. You want to have a culture of how to handle yourself off the court, how you handle yourself on the court, your demeanor, your mentality, (etc.). So I had to go and recruit players that wanted to be there, wanted to build a legacy, and wanted to do something outside of the box. That is just my philosophy on life—I always want to challenge the status quo. The only way that you can really challenge the status quo is to do stuff that is uncommon and is unorthodox. For us, we wanted to bring players that (not only) played hard on both sides of the ball, but (also) wanted to be a part of that vision of doing something different and uncommon. That second year, we brought in a couple of players and started to build from there. In the last couple of seasons, we have brought in more players that want to build a legacy and want to do something different (as well). When you look at Wagner you want to say, "Oh man, that group played extremely hard." So when that next recruiting class comes in, there are those expectations and standards that are to be followed. For me, as far as teaching and coaching, it really gave me a reason to keep coming. It gave me a reason to continue to believe in myself, believe that I can help and be of service, teach the game at a high level, and continue to dream.



**Reflecting back on those times of adversity, what are some key lessons that you would share with others about the importance of resilience, dedication, and personal growth during challenging moments?**

When something is taken away from you, and it is your passion, it hurts so much. When you have an opportunity to do it again, the next time you are going to be prepared, put in the necessary work, and self-reflect so you don't feel that way again. All of those losses, I never looked at them as losses—I looked at them as lessons. I had gone through so much to get back to Wagner and get that opportunity that I was never like, "Man, we look so bad." It was more (of): "What did we learn from this? What type of players do we need to bring in?" Now, all of those different things that I experienced as an assistant, we want to pass it along to our players. We want to help them (learn) how to handle adversity, how to respond when things don't go your way, and how to learn from your experiences. It is all about learning how you can be better tomorrow. It is about growth and development. It is about wanting to get the best out of yourself—not comparing yourself to other people, but comparing yourself to yourself. You are in a battle with yourself.

**"Be yourself. Be willing to sacrifice. Know that in due time, as long as you keep your focus on being of service to young people and to the players, you will be just fine. You will have a great career."**

*- Coach Coburn on a piece of advice he would give to someone interested in coaching.*

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

Basketball to me is life. It is not just shooting the ball or dribbling the ball around. Basketball has really taught me about perseverance, mental toughness, working hard, being diligent, being disciplined, being focused, and working as a team. All of those things can be done outside of shooting the ball or dribbling. It also gave me something to look forward to. It boosted my confidence. It boosted my self-esteem and gave me something to look towards. You always hear the phrase: "There are 24 hours in a day." (Basketball) really taught me that if you want something in life, you are going to dedicate your time to that—that is what it has done for me. So when I look at the game of basketball, I look at it as a game of life.

**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 and going into coaching?**

The biggest thing I would say is, "Be willing to sacrifice." If you have a true passion for the game and a true passion for being of service to young people, you will be great. You have to be willing to sacrifice to be in this game (though)—just kind of pay your dues. I have always said to younger coaches, "Don't be afraid to ask questions. Don't be afraid to build relationships." I was in that mold at one point. I didn't do a good job of networking as a young assistant because I was just so close-minded, to myself, and a little quiet. So I would say, "Be yourself. Be willing to sacrifice. Know that in due time, as long as you keep your focus on being of service to young people and to the players, you will be just fine. You will have a great career."

**On the other hand, what are some pieces of advice that you would give to young athletes who want to play the game at the collegiate level?**

I think it is important to be focused, disciplined, and love the game. You have to be willing to say, "I love it so much that I am going to put in the necessary time to get better and work on my fundamentals—work on my footwork, my ball handling, reading the game, shooting the ball, and being consistent at what I do." Also be willing to say, "You know what I am in high school and I do want to hang out with my friends, but for two or three hours I am going to get in the gym instead of going to the mall or hanging out." When you play at the Division I level or you play at the collegiate level, you have to be consistent. You have to have the mindset of wanting to compete and contribute to your team.



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

I love this question. It is a great question! I would tell myself to relax, open up to people, and build more relationships. I would tell myself, "Really show people who you are and don't have the mentality of 'me against the world'." That is one thing I really wish I could go back and tell myself because I would have opened up so much more to people that I felt I could have helped or they could have helped me. I am very grateful that I have that mentality now, but it took me eight years to figure it out. So I would definitely tell myself to just allow people in and get to know other people as well.



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Photographs courtesy of Zofeea Genota (@zofeeagenota)

# ZOFEEA GENOTA

## *Marketing and Creative Services Manager | LA Sparks*

Zofeea Genota knew she wanted to pursue a career in design and visual storytelling from a very young age. For this Los Angeles, California native, using creative mediums such as photography, videography, and graphic design to tell stories was something that she was truly passionate about. After graduating from Virginia Tech with a degree in communication, Zofeea was determined to find a position where she could help others—which led to her work with Girl Scouts of the USA in D.C.. From marketing to photography to videography, she continued to discover her love for creative design during her time with the Girl Scouts organization. After a year there, Zofeea moved back to Los Angeles where she continued to work for the organization as a Marketing Specialist. It was during this time when she began to explore the next step in her career. As she started looking for different managerial positions, she came across an opportunity with the Los Angeles Sparks as a marketing manager. This was the perfect role that combined her passion for sports and background in visual storytelling. **It has been a movie ever since!** Currently, Zofeea wrapped up her second season with the LA Sparks and is excited to continue sharing the unique stories of the organization's players and coaches in the years to come.

**Let's talk about discovering your passion for visual storytelling. How did you get started in the industry? What was that journey towards working with the LA Sparks like?**

After my freshman year in college, I took a semester to do university studies and figure out what it was I wanted to get into. I stumbled upon communications, and with that, there was a focus on visual communication, visual media, and design. That kind of reignited my passion for art, design, and anything related to visual (media)—which I was really interested in when I was younger. When I switched over to communications, I took a lot of different visual media classes—photography, photojournalism, reporting, stuff like that—and I loved it. Sometimes you kind of have to go back to whatever passion you had when you were younger to realize that, even if it is not something that will get you paid right away, it is something that you are passionate about. That has been my journey throughout the past couple of years—just realizing that what really matters the most is doing the things that you are passionate about. For me, this was actually my first sports job. When I graduated from college, it was hard to find a job that was something that I wanted to do—which was design, photography, (etc.). I have always been the type of person that has to believe in what I do in order to do it well. That led me to working with a lot of nonprofits. My first real job out of college was working for Girl Scouts. I was a Marketing Specialist (there), and was responsible for doing the graphic design, photography, editing, and content at different events. The whole time that I was living in Virginia, my ultimate goal was to move back out to LA and live here. After a year of working with Girl Scouts, there was an opening at Girl Scouts here in LA for pretty much the same job. After three years of working in LA, I was kind of getting to the point of my career where I wanted to move up. I was doing the same thing for almost four years. For me it was like, “What is the next step for me? I can't be doing this forever.” The next logical step was to be a manager. When I was looking for other opportunities, I found the Marketing Manager position at the (Los Angeles) Sparks. I never would have ever imagined that I would be working for a sports team—a professional sports team for that matter—and for a brand as big as the LA Sparks. So I was very fortunate that my years of building that skill set led me to where I am now.

**Could you share more with us about that transition from the nonprofit world into the sports world? What were some of the challenges that you faced early on and how did you work to overcome them?**

There was a big difference in terms of how the business operates. Every organization, every company has its own mission and values. A nonprofit is really more so focused on grassroots initiatives, so with Girl Scouts, it was really all about building girls of confidence and character. You know, when you transition to (a new space), you really have to find the reason why. For me, when I started working for the Sparks, I was working for a professional women's team that had women empowerment at the root of it all. So it wasn't much of a difference for me. Women's professional sports, I am sure you have seen the stats, only get about 4% of media coverage. That was my motivation—to continue telling the stories of these women. So it wasn't a huge transition for me since I was continuing to share stories of amazing girls and women. I was continuing to shine a light on them. When I came into the Sparks, it was a natural transition from the nonprofit (space) with Girl Scouts to a women's professional team. It was different in the sense that I really had to learn the business side of basketball—and it was a steep learning curve. Thankfully, I have an incredible marketing team that helped me understand the nuances with working for a professional sports team.

**You just finished your second season with the LA Sparks. Reflecting back on this past season, what are some things that you learned about yourself and your passions within the space?**

I was the only person from the front office in the bubble with the team, so I was very focused on that storytelling aspect. In a typical season, I wouldn't have been doing that. So being in the bubble this past season really opened up opportunities for me to get to know our players a lot more than normal. (From) learning their stories to sharing that side of them that our fans don't get to see in a normal season, (the experience) was awesome. I am so thankful for that because it makes my job a lot easier to put their stories out there. Now that I have built a relationship with a few of our players, we are able to show their personalities and that is really what it is all about. Yes, people care about the basketball (side of things), but they want to know who our players are and that is essentially my goal—to share their stories.



**Let's talk about your personal brand! How did you get started building your personal brand in sports marketing?**

That is a great question! I don't necessarily have a personal brand. For me, it is kind of just working within my network and the people that I know. It is something that I am looking into right now (though), because for the past couple of years I have been very focused on what it is I can do for whoever it is that I work for. I have never really ventured on my own. I never really thought that I could build my own personal brand (in the space). For the most part, whatever it is that I do outside of work is through people that I know. What I appreciate about that is that people trust me in doing whatever they need me to do. My personal brand has really been about providing that sense of trust and (quality in) storytelling.



**That actually transitions perfectly into our next question, which is all about the bubble. Could you share more with us about what that experience was like for you?**

Oh man, the bubble (\*laughs\*). You know, in hindsight it was challenging. Like I said earlier, I was the only person from the front office there and I was not used to being around the team that much. In a typical season, no one from my team would be there unless they were playing at home, in practice, or at the Staples Center. Even though the circumstances were challenging with having to do testing every day and going to practice every day—it was just a lot in the logistical sense—, I am thankful that even through those challenges we were able to really strengthen our relationship. Not just me (with the players), but also the front office with the players. It was an opportunity to really understand who they are as people, who they are as women. I think that moving forward, as I look to next year, there are going to be a lot of opportunities to continue sharing those stories. It is funny because oftentimes I think about how hard the bubble was. After three months of being there, I feel like I came out thinking: “I can do anything.” You know, when I think about it now, it was a lot. You are around these people 24/7, so you form (unique) bonds and relationships with them. I would have never known a lot of the things that people do, especially our staff—such as Courtney Watson, our Athletic Director, and our assistant coaches. We formed this kind of bond with each other that I am really grateful for.

**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 sports marketing?**

In my first year or two working for the Sparks, I have been fortunate to have the opportunity to hire interns for our marketing team. Before this job, I had never hired interns in my life. So for me, it was also a learning experience. When I looked at the different resumes and stuff like that, I realized that it really comes down to whether or not you are willing to learn and you are willing to put in the work. Like I said throughout this conversation, if it something that you are super passionate about, then the work and the learning should come naturally to you. I think my advice in general—not only for (roles in) the sports industry—is, “Always have this willingness to learn. Whether it is sports that you are passionate about or (another) field, there is always an opportunity to learn something new.” Design, photography, and videography changes all the time, so you have to be adaptable in that sense. What I try to tell the interns that I have hired over the past two years is to always be open to different things. In the world of social media, there is always stuff that you might see on Instagram, Facebook, or Twitter that you can draw inspiration from.



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

A piece of advice I would give to my younger self would be: “It is okay to make mistakes.” I think that it has been ingrained in us to always be perfect or to never make mistakes. When I look back at all of the things that I have been through and the struggles that I have had, I have learned (that) it is okay to fail. It is okay to make mistakes. If you fall, you can always get back up. If there is something that you are working towards that you think you are going to get, but you don’t get, (know) that there will always be another opportunity for you. Somehow, someday, it all works out in the end—that is the advice I would give to my younger self.



**"It is okay to make mistakes. If you fall, you can always get back up. If there is something that you are working towards that you think you are going to get, but you don't get, (know) that there will always be another opportunity for you. Somehow, someday, it all works out in the end."**

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

# ROB LORENZO

## *Sports Photographer & Videographer*

Born and raised in Toledo, Ohio, Rob Lorenzo remembers continuously playing the game of basketball growing up. From the incredible friendships to the life-long lessons, basketball was a world that allowed him to create some of the most special memories and unforgettable moments. It was during his time in high school though where Rob decided to step away from the court. After he reflected on his passions for telling stories, being behind the camera, and pushing creative boundaries, Rob was committed to finding a creative role that merged his love for the game and visual storytelling. **Little did he know, but in just a few years, that drive to authentically share stories of athletes and organizations would lead him down an incredible path in sports.** Rob strengthened his skills and developed new friendships in the industry by immersing himself in photography—capturing cars, landscapes, products for commercial use, and family portraits. Shortly after, he began to uncover his niche in sports photography. **The rest is history!** Since then, Rob has photographed some of the nation's top athletes. From high school basketball players to professional athletes in the NFL, he has continued to raise the bar in creative storytelling while emphasizing his commitment to sharing genuine stories with others. **Truly amazing.**



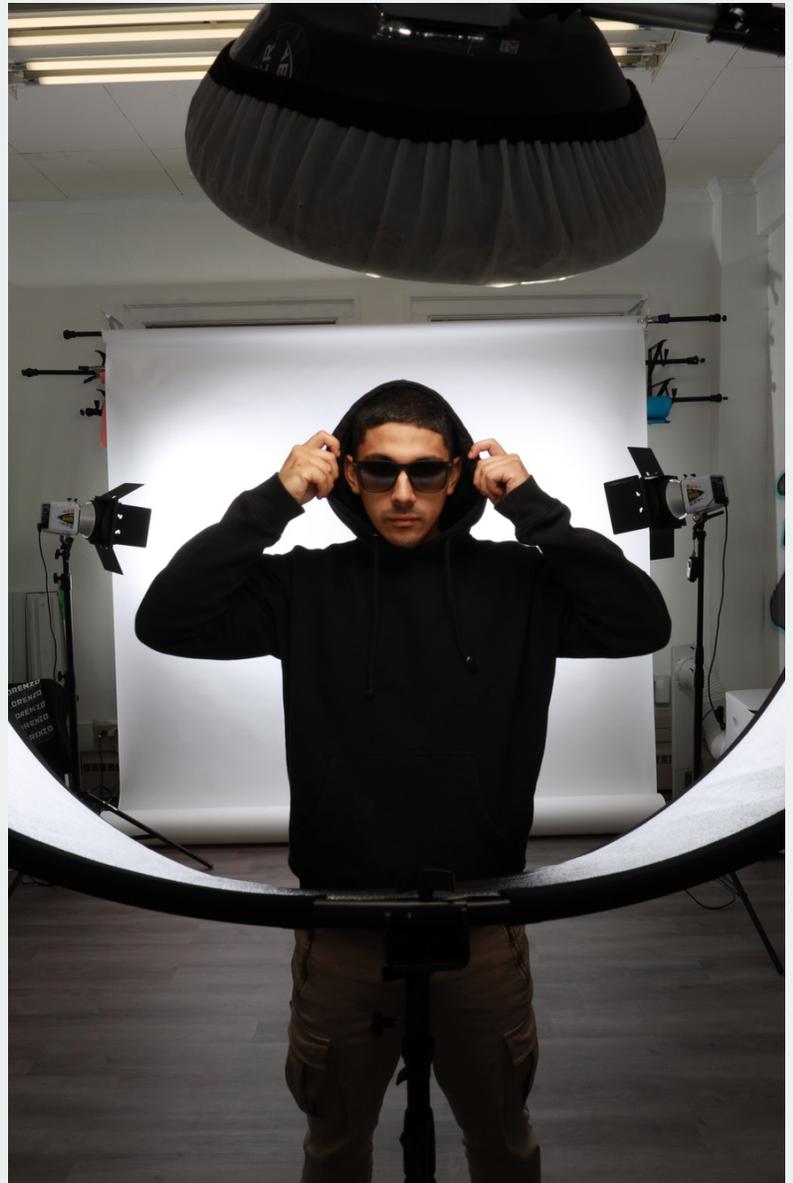
*Photographs courtesy of Rob Lorenzo (@roblorenzo)*

**Let's talk about building your personal brand! You mentioned that you started in commercial photography and family portraits. How did you find your niche with sports?**

My mentor branded himself under a certain label—he had a specific company name. I learned that a lot of people didn't know who he was locally because he did that. (For instance) if you think of a major brand like Target, off the top of my head, I don't know who the main person or people are that created Target. Under my name, I was like: "Well if I stick with my name (for my brand), I know that if I do something really well people will know my name. If I mess up, it is the same thing though—people will know who it was." So I think I had a certain expectation for myself building a brand, and I think I did it without really even realizing it. People kind of knew what I would and wouldn't do. I think it goes back to the social media world and how I made sports my niche. There are other things that I do outside of sports, but I am a firm believer of: "you post what you want to get hired for." One of the things that I like to do is pre-game outfits (for example). When COVID hit, and I was working in the NFL with ESPN, I was out of a job—since I was on the sidelines specifically. It was all about adapting for me. I fell back on those relationships of who I knew, and what kind of value I could bring to them. So it was all about figuring out what brand value I could bring to not only myself, but to these other athletes. I think that at the end of the day what people need to realize is that athletes are people. You have to bring that professionalism, and that comes with the brand image of figuring out who you are and what you bring to the table.

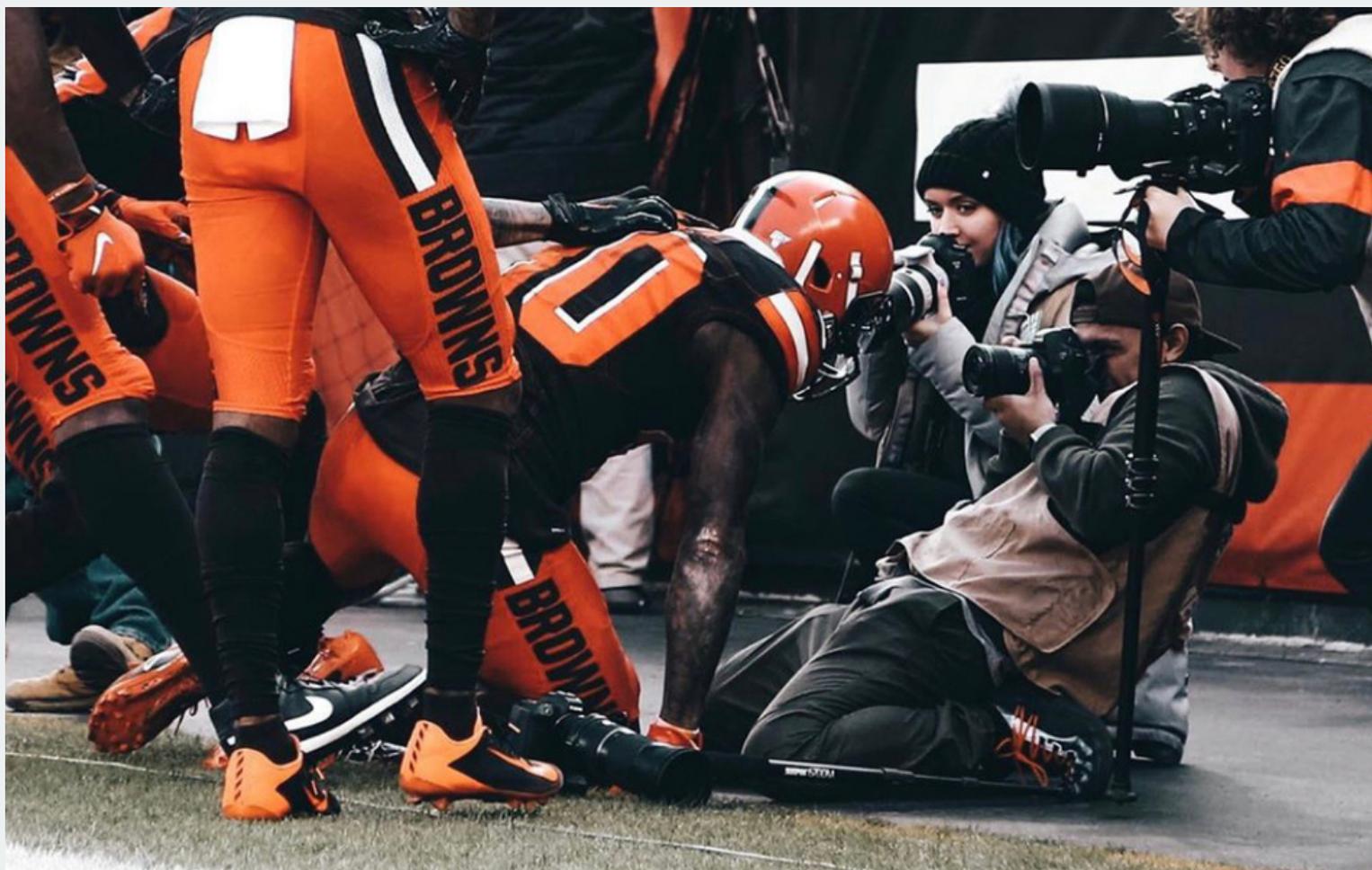
**As you got started building your personal brand, what were some challenges that you faced early on? How did you work to overcome them?**

I think being younger, especially when I first started out, there was an ego trip. So I am from Toledo, and Toledo is a smaller city where not many people were photographing sports and doing things like that at the time—I was one of the only ones around here really doing it consistently. I think I just kind of felt like, “I am that guy.” You start to open your eyes to the broader world (though) and how many people are in the sports industry nationwide, their passions and talents, and I think I had to humble myself really early on. I was finding out that there were so many people that were better than me at what I do. I needed to be consistently learning. I think I reconciled with (the importance) of continuing to learn. This idea of: “I am never going to have it (all) figured out, but the people I surround myself with is important.” I had to learn that there are certain people I should be hanging out with, and certain people that I shouldn’t be hanging around. It’s more about who is bringing value to me and who can I bring even more value to as well.



**Throughout our chat, you have highlighted the impact that relationships have had throughout your journey. Could you share your thoughts with us about the importance of having that tribe of people that continue to push and inspire you to keep growing in the space?**

Yeah! Oftentimes people ask me, “Why don’t you just leave Toledo? Since you are in Cleveland, New York, or LA a lot.” At the end of the day, this is where I am from. Toledo has given me the luxury to come and go as I please, and that is ultimately because of my database here. I have built relationships where people have watched me grow to where I am now and have seen my work mature over the years. I think that is so important. Whether I stay in Toledo or not, I think those relationships can contribute in so many different ways. I think so many people think one-dimensional—as in “How can they benefit me?”—, but at the end of the day I want to see how I can benefit them. I want to keep going and growing. Those relationships are so important. As I continue to do this, it is fun to meet all of these different people that are running startups from Toledo or have major organizations outside of Toledo. I just like coming home, and I wouldn’t be able to do it without my relationships and my database that I have continued to grow here.



**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 sports photography and videography?**

I would say, "Shoot anything and everything to figure out what you don't like. At that point, narrow it down to what you like and the things that inspire you throughout those few months or years of shooting consistently." For people that are into photo and video, I think the best camera that you have is (the one) that is in your pocket. I can spend thousands of dollars in equipment if I want—and I have—but at the end of the day if I have a phone on me and Emoni Bates throws down a crazy dunk and we post it, it's going to go viral. If Zia Cooke has a crazy crossover and we get it, it's going to go viral. Just be there—be at the things that you ultimately want to be at. Also, don't be afraid to reach out to people. There are so many times where I have been told "no" or have shot high school games from nosebleeds at a university because they wouldn't credential me. My stuff just went viral and I have gotten paid off of those things that I wasn't necessarily given the opportunity or the chance to do at first. So don't be afraid to take on those early risks.

## **What are some characteristics or skills that you think can help someone excel in the creative space of the industry?**

Oh man! I think so often I find remarkable photographers, videographers, and graphic designers, but they are not personable. I think one of the biggest things is having personable people. So I think trying to be social, personable, and relatable are some of those underlying traits that a lot of people should have. It took me a long time to understand that until I started hiring people that were awkward on the job. I would (also) say, "Try to be a little more extroverted." To me, I feel like I am an introvert, but at the end of the day I am just trying to have fun and we are (all) here for the same reasons.

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

"Don't be afraid to take more risks, and don't be afraid of the monetary return on things because ultimately there are long-term investments in a lot of the things that you are doing." If I could tell younger Rob anything, it would be that—to continue to make those long-term investments and not worry about the business and financial side. That comes with a lot of things. I would just say, "Make sure that you are making investments and even more relationships (in the space), because when things like a pandemic hit, it pays off."

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

Passionate, professional, and teammate. At the end of the day, it goes back to my roots of being in sports. I want to be the "assists" guy—that is ultimately what I want to do. I just want to give everybody the assist, and I want them to get their buckets. That is a part of who I am as a professional. I am just passionate about getting the job done in a professional (manner), and am there to be a teammate, be open to suggestions, and give out assists.



**"I am a huge LeBron's sneakerhead—I just think the quality is there. I think the Kith x LeBron collaboration is amazing. I love all of them. That line specifically is one where I can pull something out and rock. I know the argument is that LeBron's are hard to rock with anything, but I feel like if you are hooping, it is just a sweet on-court shoe."**

**- Rob on his favorite sneaker in his collection.**

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

# LYDIA RIVERS

From growing up in Kinston, North Carolina to watching her older brother play basketball as a kid to learning about her dad's athletic career at Virginia Tech—in both basketball and football—, Lydia Rivers was immersed in the world of sports from a very young age. As she embarked on a journey of her own at just eight years old, Lydia played in her brother's basketball league before joining different recreational leagues. **It was only up from there.** During her high school career, she continued to expand her insight on the game and leave her mark on the court—earning an array of accolades including Kinston's Female Athlete of the Year. But, it was not all a walk in the park. In her junior year of high school, Lydia

suffered an ACL injury that would keep her from playing the majority of her senior season. Despite this adversity, she remained committed. She was determined to return to the court stronger than ever and continue her journey playing basketball. **She did just that.** As she began her collegiate career at Radford University, Lydia continued to solidify her commitment to playing the game at the highest level. From winning the Big South title to earning a trip to the NCAA tournament, she had an incredible collegiate career at Radford that equipped her with the skills and knowledge to continue her journey at Virginia Tech (VT). As a graduate student at VT, Lydia began to prepare for the next step in her career—the chance to play basketball professionally. **Before she knew it, the opportunity was here and she was ready!** Lydia is currently playing her first professional basketball season in Turkey for GCT Duzce. From the style of play overseas to her personal basketball IQ, Lydia is looking forward to strengthening her knowledge of the game further, and sharing that with the next generation of young athletes and aspiring basketball players. **Simply amazing.**

## SPOTLIGHT SERIES - LYDIA RIVERS

### **When did you discover that you wanted to embark on a professional career in basketball and play the game at the highest level?**

Honestly, God has a funny way of working things out. In high school, the thought of playing in college and earning a scholarship didn't really occur to me until my sophomore year when I got my first offer. Then, I started playing AAU that summer of sophomore year. In college, I just always worked hard, put God first, and it kind of just worked out this way.



*Photographs courtesy of Lydia Rivers (@lydiaa\_20)*

### **As you transitioned from high school to college, what were some of the challenges that you faced early on?**

My junior year—going into my senior year—I tore my ACL, so I was out for the majority of my senior season. With that, some offers actually dropped off. But the college I chose, Radford University, stayed with me. Coach McGuire was really honest and was like, “We still want you. We don't care about your injury and we know you will be alright when you get here.”

### **Throughout that time of adversity, where you worked to recover from an injury, what kept you focused and motivated mentally to continue pushing through?**

My faith is a huge thing (to me). So just leaning on that, the support of my family and friends, and that community was great. They were always supporting me and telling me, “We miss you out there.” I was actually able to come back and play the last two or three games to make it to state that year. We lost in the finals, but it was still pretty amazing to be back after six months.

## SPOTLIGHT SERIES - LYDIA RIVERS



**During your career at Radford University, you also won the Big South title and earned a trip to the NCAA tournament. What was that experience like for you?**

It was so amazing! You don't really realize it until it happens. The moment you win, the tears just come because you realize all the pre-seasons, post-seasons, hard strength and conditioning, and sacrifices that you have made to play in college. It was just an awesome feeling and experience with the group that we were with.

**Let's talk about taking that next step in your career! Could you share more with us about your experience playing professional basketball overseas?**

The rookie season is hard because you are away from your family. It is definitely a learning experience—where you learn a lot about yourself—, but it is just a huge blessing honestly. You definitely have to be mentally prepared to play overseas (though). College kind of prepares you (in terms of) the work ethic that you need to have, and the time you have to take to do extra work. You just have to keep that discipline. Here, they are not going to tell you to go shoot or give you a schedule (to train). So you just have to really schedule your time and be patient with the process.

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

That is something that is still in the works, to be honest. I know that eventually the ball will stop bouncing, and something that I am really passionate about and studied in school was strength and conditioning. So I have been reaching out to a lot of strength coaches back home about what I can do now. Eventually, I would like to own my own gym as well.

## **That's awesome! What inspired that interest of not only going into strength and conditioning, but also having that entrepreneurial side of wanting to have your own business?**

For the strength and conditioning part, the two ACL tears that I have had both in college and high school definitely inspired my interest there. Also, I know I want to stay around the game somehow after my career ends. The (interest in) owning my own business within the strength and conditioning (space) is definitely a family thing. My brother is really interested in the strength world as well. My cousin—who has played professionally for thirteen years—wants to do something around that too, so we think it would be cool to have a whole family workout center. It would just be awesome!

## **What does basketball mean to you? Why is this game so special?**

Looking back, I am so grateful for this game; the opportunities it provided, the life lessons it has taught (me), the amazing people I have met that have turned to family, and the places it has allowed me to see. Both Virginia Tech and Radford have provided me with some of my fondest memories. This sport creates unity in a world that is in dire need of it. It has created a platform that, if used appropriately, will inspire the next generation and positively impact people around the world.

## **What is a piece 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, "Embrace this journey of life; never take for granted these moments and opportunities, because they shape you into the person you are today. Stay present, because you're exactly where you are supposed to be at this moment. God's timing is perfect."



**"Don't be afraid to do the extra work and push yourself to compete even harder. Be confident and trust yourself to be more vocal. And stop comparing your game to others; instead, be patient because your time is coming."**

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



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**STUART SCOTT**

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**WINSTON CHURCHILL**

**"Don't judge each day by the harvest you reap but by the seeds that you plant."**

**ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON**

**"Thoughts become things. If you see it in your mind, you will hold it in your hand."**

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