

BALLERS

SPORTS + BUSINESS + INSPIRATION

JULY ISSUE

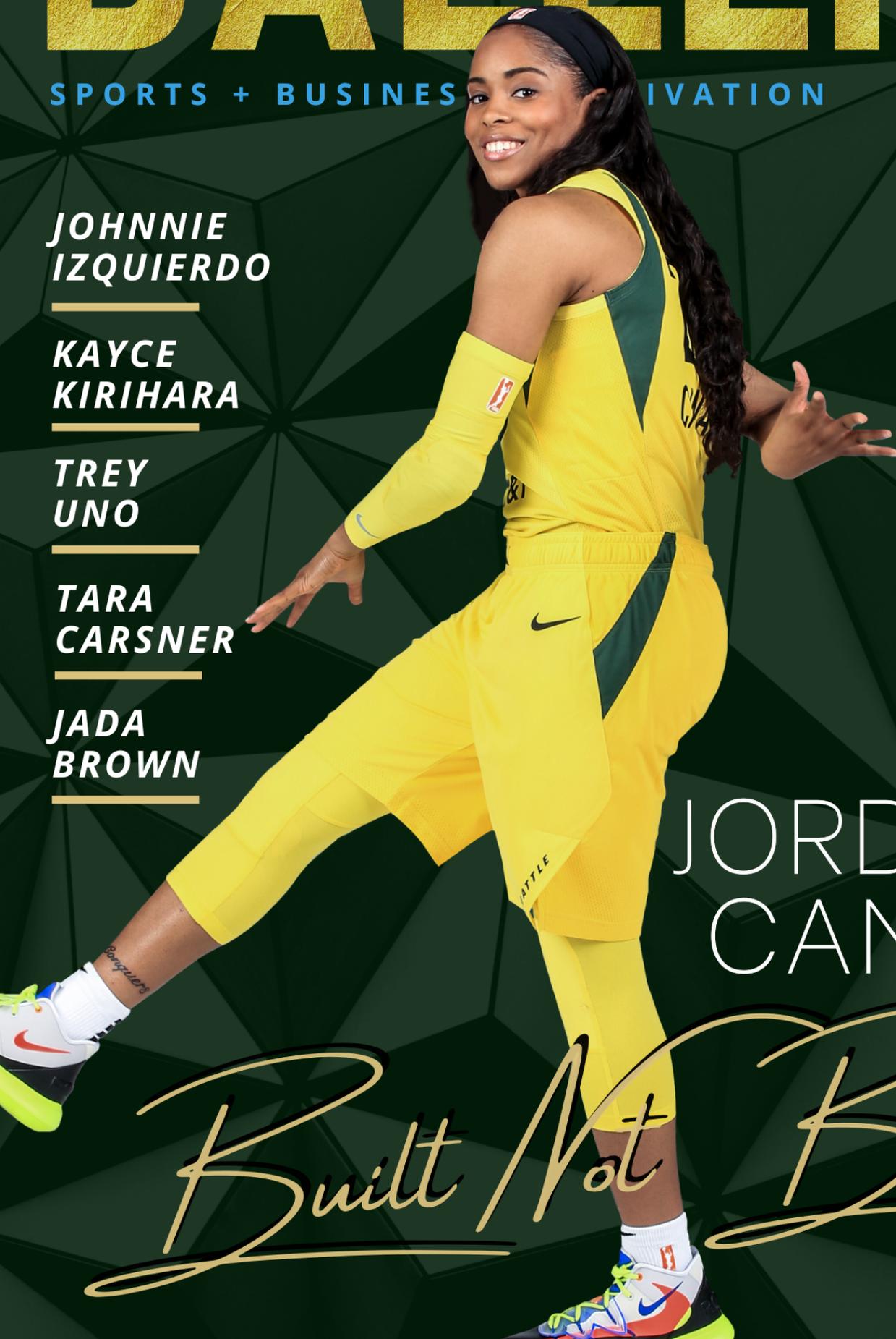
JOHNNIE
IZQUIERDO

KAYCE
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TREY
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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
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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
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JORDIN CANADA - BUILT NOT BORN

For Jordin Canada, the game of basketball was a world she became immersed in since she was just six and a half years old. After watching her older cousins play in the backyard of her grandmother's house growing up, she was determined to begin her own journey in basketball. **It was at this moment that her journey in basketball truly began.** As the years progressed, Jordin continued to work on her skills on the court. From shooting to ball handling to passing, Jordin was committed to elevating her game. She was determined to work towards one day playing basketball at the professional level. As she graduated from high school as one of the nation's top players, Jordin was ready to embark on a new chapter in her basketball career at UCLA. She was excited to be playing for an institution that recognized that it was bigger than basketball, and encouraged her to be an agent of change both on and off the court. **She did just that.** During her time at UCLA, Jordin would go on to earn an array of accolades and school records in addition to fostering a personal legacy that would last for many years to come. But for Jordin, there was more. She wanted to make her dream of playing basketball at the highest level a reality. **Sure enough, through her hard work and dedication, she accomplished her dream!** With their fifth pick in the first round of the 2018 WNBA Draft, the Seattle Storm selected Jordin. **The rest is history.** Not only has Jordin become a WNBA Champion since getting drafted in 2018, but she has also been able to play overseas during the league's offseason. Currently, Jordin is getting ready to begin her third season with the Seattle Storm, and is looking forward to continuing fostering her legacy in the game while paving the way for the next generation. **It's safe to say that the best is yet to come!**

Could you share more with us about your college journey? What was that transition process like for you going from playing in college to playing in the WNBA?

When I first got to college, that's when I really started to understand what the phrase "Falling in love with the process was." I mean, I was always good in high school, but I never really understood how hard you had to work and the work ethic that you had to have to get to the next level. When I got to college, I was playing against girls who were 22 years old and seniors and I was a freshman. I started as a freshman as well, so it was really difficult for me to grasp the new system, players, teammates, and just trying to stay on top of things. After my freshman year, that is when I really started to work towards getting better and improving on things that I needed to (on the court). I didn't really hit my stride until probably my junior year, when all the results from late nights and going 100% in every practice started showing for me. Transitioning into the professional (side), being a starter all four years in college and having to come and play off the bench on a great team was something I was never used to. I had never done (that). I had to find a new role into how I could impact the team in a different way, and that was something I struggled with. I had confidence issues. Some days I would play really well, some days I wouldn't. I was just very inconsistent because I didn't have that confidence. After the first year (though), we actually won a championship which is something I never thought would happen. As I transitioned into my second year, I had to step up in a major way filling in for Sue (Bird) who was out for the whole season. I think that built my confidence back up—having that player's experience, being able to play a little bit more, and just having fun. I think that is what separated my first year from my second year.

You mentioned the process of having to adjust to a new role and playing at a different level as you transitioned into playing basketball in the league. What did you learn about yourself throughout that process?

Confidence—that was the most important thing (I learned). If you have confidence in yourself, you can pretty much go out there and do what you need to do no matter what role you are in. Confidence was a huge thing (for me). Also, just building my IQ and improving on things that I thought I was good at in college—being able to read things a little bit faster, coming off of pick and rolls, knowing where my teammates like to shoot, their best spots, etc. Just things that I really didn't think about when I was in college, but that are really important in the pros.

Let's talk about Draft Night! You shared that during your time in college, you started seeing your hard work really come to fruition during your junior year and as you wrapped up your collegiate career at UCLA. Looking back at that moment when they called your name and selected you in the 2018 WNBA Draft, what was that experience like for you?

It was one of the best experiences I have ever had to be honest. I knew that I wanted to play professionally when I got into college—that was a dream of mine. Being acknowledged as one of the top athletes in my class, being invited to the draft, having those experiences with the other top players in my class, and sharing that moment with them is something that not a lot of girls get to experience. The fact that I was one of them is something that I will always be grateful for. Hearing my name be called, making my dream come true, having my family and friends who were there, and playing for an organization like the Seattle Storm—an organization that is truly amazing and welcomed me with open arms—I just felt great all around.



During your first year, you were not only living out your dream of playing professional basketball, but you also became a WNBA Champion your rookie season. What was that moment like for you?

It was the craziest experience. When I came in, I never thought that that was going to be the case. Every team always hopes and wishes to win a championship every season, but my main focus coming in (during my first year) was to play my role to the best of my abilities. I wanted to learn the system, know my teammates, and just get acquainted with the league. As the season went on (though) and we were winning a lot of games, I was like "Wow! We can actually win this whole thing." Once we got into the playoffs, we had to play against Phoenix and that is when it truly hit me. I was like, "I am in the playoffs. I am playing against one of the best teams." Just (reflecting on) how hard you have to work for it was crazy. Once we got to the finals and we won every single game, I remember sitting on the sidelines with a minute left in the fourth quarter of Game 3, and trying to hold back my smile. I was like, "Wow, I am really about to become a WNBA Champion." One of the best experiences that I have had.

Your role elevated in your second season with the Storm. Did you tap into some of those experiences from playing overseas to elevate your game? If so, would you recommend the opportunity to play overseas for people who want to pursue a career in professional basketball?

Yeah! I think when I went overseas, that was basically when I got my confidence back. Like I said, my rookie year I was inconsistent and was going up and down. When I had to go to Poland, I had to become the starting point guard (there), so I had to jump back into that role of being a leader and using my voice to lead my team. When I came back from playing overseas, I think that is what kind of led me into the position that I was in for (the Storm) my second year—not being afraid to use my voice and step up in certain situations. Playing in Poland helped me a lot. For people that are considering going overseas, it is a great experience. I definitely want to go back, hopefully that is able to happen with everything going on right now, but I think it is a great experience for anyone who is passionate about basketball and still wants to play. I mean, you are playing in a beautiful country, you are surrounded by different cultures, you make new friends from all over the world, and (more). I think that's what is so special about basketball—you get that opportunity to see the world and build relationships.



“My value comes from who I am, not from what I do.” I learned that in college. Oftentimes when you become an athlete, you feel like you are not as successful if you don't do this or don't accomplish that. I have learned that who you are as a person matters more than what you do. What you do is not who you are. Learning to separate the two, and knowing that what you value in life, your morals, and values as a person is what makes you who you are. Those are the things that make people want to get to know and fall in love with you as a person.”

- Jordin on one of her favorite quotes to live by and remember throughout this journey

Looking back at your journey and love for the game, what does basketball mean to you? Why is it so special?

Basketball means everything to me. It has built me into the person that I am (today). It has taught me valuable lessons about work ethic, responsibility, leadership, and using your voice. I am very quiet and laid back—I don't usually say much—but basketball forces me to step outside that comfort zone. It has (also) helped me build relationships and create friendships that I never thought I would create. There are people that I played basketball with when I was younger, and I still have relationships with them. You just build bonds for life, and I think that is what is so special about basketball. For me, getting that opportunity to build relationships, see the world, and play in countries I never thought I would play in has allowed me to learn valuable life lessons that have helped me grow as a person.

Besides basketball, what are some things that inspire you?

Besides basketball, I am really getting into the fashion scene. I am coming out with my own clothing line, it's the JaeCan Brand, but the mantra is "Built Not Born." That should be coming out in the next couple of months so I am really excited about that. I really love kids and giving back to the community in any way that I can as well. Whether that is with basketball or mentorship, I am really interested in (paying it forward).

What are some pieces of advice that you would give to people who are interested in pursuing a similar career path and playing professional basketball?

One piece of advice I would give is: "Make sure your work ethic is 100%" Like I said, I didn't really understand how hard I had to work and how much work ethic I had to have until I got to college. So whatever your dream is—whether you want to play basketball in college or professionally—work ethic has to be number one. Another thing is sacrifice. You have to sacrifice your time. People have to understand that if you are serious and passionate about something, and you want to get to the next level, it is going to take a lot of time and sacrifice. That is something that I had to experience at a young age. I wasn't able to see my family and friends because I was always practicing, traveling, etc. So I think to understand the sacrifice and work ethic at a young age that you have to have is something that I think will get you very, very far.

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

That's a great question. I think I would tell myself: "Enjoy every moment." I think when I was younger, I wouldn't necessarily live in the moment and enjoy it. I would usually get something done and move on to the next thing. So whether it was accomplishing something in basketball that I always wanted to accomplish or just outside of basketball in general, I would definitely tell my younger self to live in the moment.



Photographs courtesy of Jordin Canada (@jaeacan)

TREY UNO

Content Creator



Photographs courtesy of Trey Uno (@treyuno)

Born and raised in New York, Trey was surrounded by the world of sports from a very young age. From football to boxing, Trey played a variety of sports growing up; but it was in basketball where he found his true passion. **At just 12 years old, Trey had found the sport that filled his spirit.** Basketball meant a lot to him—it was his opportunity to be creative with his game, showcase his talents, and unplug from the world. It was his therapy. As the years progressed, it became more and more clear to Trey that his dream was to play basketball at the highest level—the NBA. **But the universe had a different plan for him.** It was with his creativity and talent that he would impact the game both on and off the court. Suddenly, an opportunity to work with Overtime—a digital sports network that focuses on showcasing talented, young athletes and sharing content with sports fans—came up, and Trey was ready to give this opportunity a shot. **It has only been up from there!** During his time with Overtime, Trey not only received a series of opportunities to interview some of the nation's top high school athletes, but he also became one of the top talents in the organization. **It was during this time that he discovered his love for content creation.** Currently, Trey is focusing on building his personal brand, curating innovative content for his platforms, and working on collaborations with some of the industry's leading brands.

Could you share with us more about that process of building your personal brand after your time with Overtime? What were some of the challenges that you faced early on?

I just took everything that I learned from Overtime, and put it into myself. I just tried to stay motivated and keep my mind racing every day with new ideas. For me, it was all about “How can I make this idea better than the previous one?” It has been a great journey (thus far). I’m not going to lie though, after that situation happened, I was a little nervous—I didn’t know where I would go or what I was going to do. When I did post that I wasn’t with Overtime anymore, the outpour of opportunities that came in were incredible. I didn’t know how much value I had to people. I didn’t know how much I meant to certain kids that looked up to me. The fact that they still supported me afterwards was amazing. My biggest challenge was probably (having) confidence in myself. After the whole situation happened, I woke up and I was scared. I didn’t know what would be next. I wasn’t used to doing this on my own. So I had to take a step back and create those opportunities for myself more than anything.

Take us through that process of fostering your own brand as a content creator and having to create opportunities for yourself in the industry. What were some of the things that you learned about yourself during that time?

With me, my issue (early on) was that I was very, very scared to be myself. I was scared to speak to people. I was scared to open up. Honestly, I don’t think you should be scared to do any of that because in this industry there is nothing but help. People are always looking out for you if you need help, especially if they are trying to build their own brand. It is very rare that they will say “no” to someone asking for help. For me (for instance), I would never speak up. If I wanted to work with someone, I would never say anything and that kind of left me in quicksand. I wasn’t really doing anything with myself to grow and (evolve) when I wasn’t speaking up. That’s when I took into consideration the saying, “A close mouth doesn’t get fed.” So I started speaking up and reaching out to people, and it was surprisingly easy to connect with others (in the industry). Literally from there, the opportunities just kept rolling and coming my way.



"TRUST YOUR CRAFT
AND ALIGN YOURSELF
WITH THE RIGHT
PEOPLE THAT ARE
GOING TO BE THERE
FOR YOU."

— *Trey on advice he would give to
someone interested in pursuing a
similar career path*



Good Looks!
家族

What are some pieces of advice that you would give to someone who is interested in pursuing a similar career path?

I would say just to trust your craft and align yourself with the right people that are going to be there for you. What I mean by that is, align yourself with not just your fans and the people you work with, but also your friends and family. There are times when you might be down and can't really lift yourself up—but the people around you are the ones who remind you of what you are capable of doing. Just being mindful of who you surround yourself with is very important. So I would say to make sure there is nothing but positivity around you, that way regardless of what you are going through, you still have positive forces that can uplift and help you during those times.

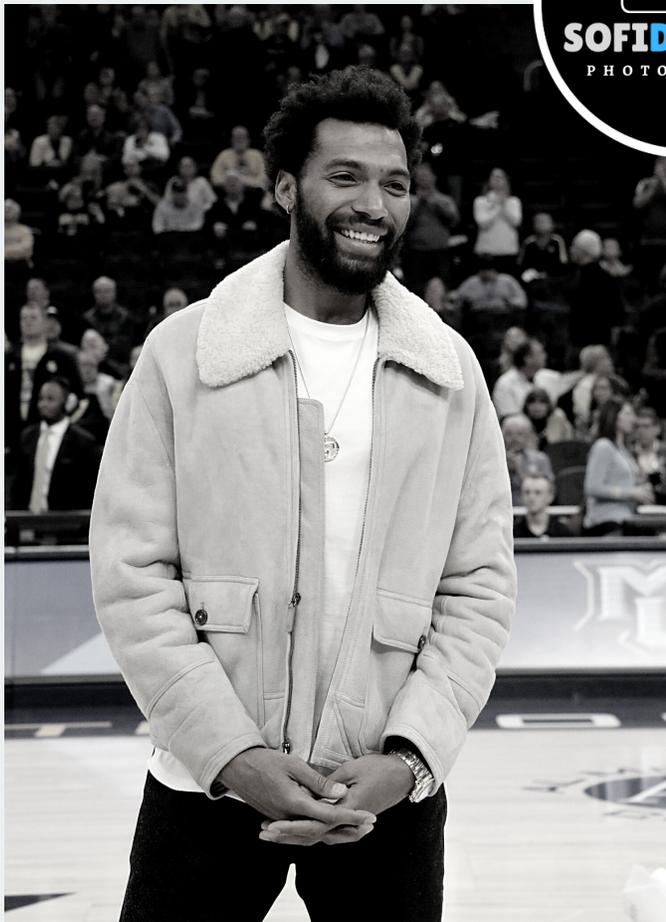
Looking back at your personal journey in the industry, if you could give your younger self a piece of advice what would it be and why?

That is an amazing question! If I could give my younger self a piece of advice, it would be to be very patient. Honestly, I used to have zero patience. If I knew what would happen with my career, I wouldn't have been as worried. When I was younger, I would be like "If you don't make it to the NBA, you are a failure." That's how I used to look at life. I would just not participate or take advantage of opportunities that didn't have anything to do with the NBA. Looking back now, I would say (to my younger self): "You have to realize that you are young and you have to take advantage of the opportunities that present themselves to you. These opportunities may help you in the future go towards the goals that you really want to do."

Throughout this journey, what are you fueled by? What are some of your sources of motivation?

Two things: 1) Life growing up and 2) My mom. When I was a kid, we weren't as fortunate and my family and I faced a lot of adversity. I vowed to myself that I would never ever take advantage of that moment (or opportunity) that would take me away from that situation. I never wanted to go back to that, and that is what motivates me every single day. I want better for my siblings, for my future, and for my mom right now—that's the second thing that motivates me, my mom. She doesn't even know it, but she motivates me every single day.





JOHNNIE IZQUIERDO

Sports Photographer

For Johnnie Izquierdo, the world of sports and entertainment was an industry he was committed to pursuing a career in since his days at Montclair State University. During his time in college, Johnnie majored in business and public relations, and dreamed about becoming a publicist in the industry upon graduation. **Little did he know that the universe had an entire different plan for him—one that was bigger than he could ever have imagined.** After graduating from Montclair State, Johnnie secured an entry level position right out of college but wasn't happy. He was unfulfilled. **He felt like there was something bigger for him. He wasn't sure what it was, but he was determined to figure it out.** As he was working at his second job after graduation, Johnnie continued to feel this itch to get out and explore the world. He wanted to be free. On August 6, 2016 he took that leap of faith to figure out what it was he wanted to do and quit his job. From societal to parental to personal pressures, Johnnie felt overwhelmed by the level of uncertainty regarding his future. But he was committed to push through, he wanted to discover his passion. While working as a bartender at his friend's bar, Johnnie decided to pick up a camera as a hobby to clear and occupy his mind. **That is when he found his true passion—the world of photography.** Johnnie began photographing everything from events to skylines to food, and continued to strengthen his knowledge and skills in the space. One day in 2017, as he was catching up with his high school friend Trevor Harris, who at the time was the Program Coordinator for the North East

Basketball Club—an organization that features a lot of high-profile basketball prospects—, Trevor offered him the opportunity to come photograph one of the games. **It was only up from there.** From different tournaments to high school games to sporting events, Johnnie embraced every opportunity to further his craft, and continued expanding his portfolio and personal brand in the industry. **The rest is history!** Ever since then, Johnnie has collaborated with some of the industry's top brands and athletes, and has fostered a unique style in the industry grounded on innovation and creativity. **The best part of it all is...he is just getting started!**

You mentioned that when you started your personal brand, it showcased everything from weddings to portraits to skyline pictures. How did you begin that transition to building a personal brand that was more focused on sports photography?

I will never forget, my buddy Donte—he does video over at Overtime—, he told me “Yo Johnnie, I think you should just make this a sports only page. That way you can post all your stuff only here.” So I'll never forget, I ditched my old page and I started this (sports only) page and called it “Johnnie The Shooter”—that was my first IG and was only sports. Then, I scrapped my wedding photography page and was like “You know what, I'm not going to market myself anymore in that area.” I had talked to Jennifer Pottheiser, she is a legendary photographer, who kind of mentored me through all of this stuff. She told me, “Listen, if you want to go this route don't market weddings, maternity, newborns, or food photography. If you do that too it's great, but just stick to your world.” So then when I started that new IG (focused on sports), and I would go out and photograph, people would only tag that page. It was literally up until a year ago that I changed the (username) to my last name, because I wanted to really make myself more of a global brand as opposed to a nickname.

What were some of the challenges that you faced early on in your journey towards building your personal brand in photography? How did you overcome those challenges?

I think figuring out my style and my niche of what I wanted to do within sports was the most difficult part. I think branding myself wasn't difficult for me (though) because I went to school for that, and have always known about websites and social media platforms (such as) Twitter and Instagram. I knew that my pictures needed to be clean, sharp, timely, and shared (strategically). Everything was thought out with my postings. I think that background of going to school and studying public relations and marketing has been great to me, as it has helped me so much to build my brand—even during times like these. Even in this lockdown (for instance), I feel like I have been able to grow with different projects, interviews, and things like that. Overall, I think figuring out the branding part wasn't as hard as finding out exactly what I wanted to shoot.

You have worked with an array of different brands such as Jordan, Adidas, SLAM, and more. What are some things that inspire you and empower you to remain creative in the way that you practice storytelling with different brands?

That's a great question! I think with me, what helps me a lot is that I am kind of naive in a sense. I didn't go to school for photography or art, so I don't follow the "guidelines." I respect the craft and the art form of it, but I think I don't let myself get into a box. I don't know the "rules" and am very naive in the sense that I just like to do cool stuff. Whatever I think looks cool, I am just going to do it because I believe it. At the end of the day, we are just taking photos, we are having fun, and I am having the time of my life. So when I am at work, working with brands or athletes or other people, I'm not going in there stressed out. I love this stuff. You know, (of course) I'm prepared, I do the work prior, but I am having the time of my life. I think bringing that energy and rawness is important to remaining creative (in storytelling).

Let's talk about tribes! You shared with us earlier that throughout your career you have continued to connect with people and build your network in the industry. Could you share with us your thoughts on the value of having a strong, supportive tribe of either mentors or peers in the space?

I think it is so important to have that (tribe), because you are only really as good as your support system. Whether it's photography or being a basketball player or being a singer, you can't do it all by yourself. You are going to be as strong as your weakest link. You have to be able to strip down your ego, ask for help, ask questions, and bounce off ideas with people. For instance, me and my buddy Mike—his name is Michael Reid and he is a super talented photographer down in Florida—we both do our thing and bounce off each other. It's important to put your ego down and keep pushing forward. If you are the smartest person in the room, then you are in the wrong room. I'll put it that way. So I think building your network and your team is so, so important. It has definitely been something that has been important to my growth as well, and I will continue to do it for sure.

Reflecting back on your own personal journey, if you could give your younger self a piece of advice what would it be and why?

That's a great question. If I could give my younger self a piece of advice, I would say "There is going to be a moment in your life where you are going to really question what you are doing because it is not fruiting into how you thought it would be. That is the moment where you cannot quit." I can speak on this because I had that moment in late 2017. I was thinking about "Is this really for me?" but then I decided to go all the way with a camera. This message goes for everything, across all platforms, all brands, and all jobs. The moment right before you quit, is the moment when greatness is going to happen. That moment where you feel frustrated is really the moment before you make it and greatness happens. So I would tell my younger self, and I am so thankful that I did, "Just don't quit. It's during those hardest moments, where (the breakthrough) is about to happen."



Photographs courtesy of Johnnie Izquierdo (@johnnie.izquierdo)

"Go out there and create moments. Document. Focus on storytelling, have fun, do cool stuff, stay consistent, and work hard. The rest will work itself out."

- Johnnie on advice he would give to aspiring photographers that want to collaborate with brands in the industry.

KAYCE KIRIHARA

WNBA & NBA Host | Designer



Photographs courtesy of Kayce Kirihara (@infamouskayce)

Kayce Kirihara has been immersed in the world of basketball since the age of six. Born and raised in Seattle, Washington, Kayce grew up with the dream of becoming a professional basketball player and playing in the WNBA when she was older. She still remembers spending every summer since freshman year of high school and all throughout college working with the Seattle Storm during their season. As her basketball career progressed and she was playing at the University of Hawaii-Hilo on an athletic scholarship, Kayce became more and more involved with the game. When she completed her collegiate career and graduated from college, Kayce became the Equipment Manager and Video Coordinator for the Storm. After four years of working closely with the team in this area, she was ready for the next step in her career. She transitioned into the corporate world, and began working in Marketing with Nordstrom. Throughout this time though, she knew she wanted to return to the world of sports. **She loved the game too much to be completely separated from it.** That's when she decided to step away from her job at Nordstrom, and commit to building her personal brand on social media full-time. **She hasn't looked back ever since!** From hosting in the WNBA to becoming an ambassador for an array of sports brands, Kayce has continued strengthening her personal brand in the industry and helping foster opportunities for other up-and-coming sports professionals.

After graduating from college, what was that transition process like of going into the Equipment Manager and Video Coordinator role with the Seattle Storm?

I had just got done being a collegiate athlete, so it was definitely different on the aspect that I was now on the opposite side of being a player. I was now essentially on the coaching staff. It was different seeing the business-side of basketball because I had never really seen that being a player. It allowed me to gain respect for both sides of the basketball world. That was cool. Me graduating with a degree in Communications, I honestly did it because I really didn't know what I wanted to do after college. I knew I wanted to do something in sports, potentially something in broadcasting, and I felt like communications was a really broad major that would (allow me to) explore that realm. I was literally presented that opportunity (with the Storm) as soon as I graduated college, so I really had no time to think about it. In a way, I was blessed that I got that opportunity because I really didn't have to think about what I wanted to do right after college. However, because that opportunity presented itself right after college and it wasn't necessarily what I thought I was going to be doing, I feel like I kind of had that 'transition process'—(one) of "What am I going to do now?"—between me leaving the Storm and going to Nordstrom.

You mentioned that you worked in Marketing during your time with Nordstrom. How did that experience help you to build your brand now and foster this strong platform for people to get to know you off-the-court?

I would say tremendously. To think that I have been playing sports since I was in first grade—so I have that experience of just being an athlete, and a student-athlete at that—, then going and working on the opposite side (of sports) in operations and video coordinating, and (then) being able to say that I worked in corporate for four plus years for a Fortune 500 company in Marketing has been a great learning experience. I am more of a learn-and-go type of person, and I think there are certain skills that you can't necessarily teach in college. So that was a really great learning experience for me because I gained so much knowledge and experience that I wouldn't have (gained) anywhere else. It gave me skills that I can apply now to my social media (platforms) and such.

During that time when you branched off and decided to focus on building your personal brand full-time, what were some of the challenges that you faced early on? How did you overcome them?

I would say getting into the routine of not having a set schedule (was a challenge). At first, it was kind of weird having a lot of free time on my hands and the ability to set my own schedule. That was a huge adjustment. Making sure that I stayed disciplined (was key) because I was now my own boss, I wasn't answering to anybody, so I had to be responsible for myself. I'm not going to lie, when I first made that jump I spent a lot of time traveling and doing other things. I had literally been playing AAU since I was in like fourth or fifth grade—all of my summers were dedicated to that—, so I wanted to take some personal time with that. But that transition of going from a corporate lifestyle to (one where I) essentially managed myself, was definitely a challenge because I had to ensure that I was managing my time and being productive.

What are some things that motivate and inspire you throughout this journey?

Honestly, I would really say it's my following. There are a lot of them that have been rocking with me for a very long time. I really appreciate them. I wouldn't be where I am today, doing what I am doing without them. Just the fact that I have had their support for so long, and there are so many people that believe in me and are rooting for me, motivates me. Not only do I not want to let them down, but I don't want to let myself down. Taking that leap to be a self-employed, freelance, social media influencer, and being able to make a career out of it (also) inspires me. Also, seeing the change of women in sports is just so inspiring. I have been around the WNBA since 2003, so just to see the change and where it has come is so empowering. I just want to continue to be a part of that movement and make the sports industry for women grow.

What are some pieces of advice that you would give to someone who is interested in pursuing a similar career path in the industry?

Believe in your brand. Take a chance. The worst that can happen is that you may fail, but you can pick yourself up and either try again or learn from it and do something else. You never know until you try. The advice I would give to people is: "Stay true to your brand and be you in and out." I feel like that is where we lack in some influencers. Some of them are not very genuine, but I feel like people are going to rock with you if they want to rock with you. I feel like at the end of the day, when social media is gone, all you are really going to have is your people. If you have been true to yourself the entire time, as corny as it sounds, that is really the only validation that you need. If you lose yourself in the social media world, which I have seen a lot of people do, it's hard to bounce back from that. So for me, it would be 1) stay true to your brand and 2) remain authentic—the love is going to come. Whatever you are passionate about, do it, and take that chance. You will never know unless you try. Now, that leap of faith is the hardest part, but you will be able to take a chance that you might not get again. You can't lose that determination and that motivation. I learned that (fearless) mindset playing basketball and have applied it to my everyday life. You know, in basketball, you lose games, people get cut from teams, you don't make the playoffs, etc., but those things only make you a stronger player. It's in the adversity that you (gain your) strength.



"...1)stay true to your brand and 2) remain authentic—the love is going to come. Whatever you are passionate about, do it, and take that chance. You will never know unless you try. Now, that leap of faith is the hardest part, but you will be able to take a chance that you might not get again. You can't lose that determination and that motivation.

- Kayce on advice she would give to someone interested in pursuing a similar career.

TARA CARSNER

Founder | Hometeam, LLC

Photographs courtesy of Tara Carsner (@copemrockem)

You also have your own business, Hometeam, LLC. Could you share more with us about what that process of starting your own business was like early on?

After I left the Jordan Brand, I took some time to really figure out what my passions were. I really enjoyed providing unforgettable experiences for people, giving back to the community, and doing things for the right reasons. Me working at the Brand, I worked with a lot of these agencies that were overcharging, spending money recklessly, or doing stuff that you shouldn't be doing with these brands' money. I wanted to be the agency that did things the right way, and that made me want to start Hometeam. The premise around (Hometeam) is a culturally-relevant agency that gets stuff done, does cool and innovative things, brings amazing experiences to life, cares about the brand and the consumer, and never puts themselves first. I really love being the connector for the up-and-coming creatives that don't get a chance to be with all of these (big) brands that tend to use the same influencer over and over again. For me, it was like "What about the kid that's working (extremely) hard and really is on the cutting-edge of creating new, innovative things, but only has 2,000 followers so they don't get these opportunities." I wanted to be the connector between those creatives and these brands. I started Hometeam when I left the Brand in 2016, and realized that I needed money (to fund my business) so I had to have another job on the side. From there, I got the opportunity to work with Champs Sports, they were my very first client. I helped them open their State Street flagship location (in Chicago) doing all of their community-driven events. Here is where I realized that that's where I needed to be—connecting and providing those opportunities for the creatives of Chicago and all over the world.

You shared that financial capital was a challenge that you encountered early on. What were some other challenges that you faced when you embarked on this journey to building your business?

Oh, lot's of things. I think finding the right team was very difficult—in the sense that I was having to start a business, that I wanted to run a certain way, and was doing all of these things for. So giving up some of those responsibilities to others was tough. It wasn't just about me finding the right people, it was about my evolution as a leader (as well). I think that was tough, but very rewarding once I was able to overcome those things. Beyond that, I think a huge thing was (overcoming) self-doubt, having confidence in myself, and taking ownership.

One of the business areas that you focus on with Hometeam is brand partnerships. After studying business and public relations in college, could you share more about that process of deciding to embark on a career in marketing and brand partnerships rather than working for an agency in PR?

I played Division III basketball and they didn't have a Marketing Department at my school. Marketing was always my dream, and it was always something I wanted to do (though). I think that decision to focus on marketing and brand partnerships really came when I was starting Hometeam. I just wanted to build my own experiential agency. I knew how to do events, I knew the right people, and I knew I could get people to buy into my events. But like I mentioned, I needed money, so I needed a full-time job. I was working at Bai as a Field Marketing Manager, where I was just locating all of these sponsorship deals for these festivals and events, and in doing so I was in the brand side of Brand Partnerships. I had the money to give to these creatives and these properties, and (that) educated me on how to go about securing sponsorships and partnerships. I realized that that could be another avenue in events. I got more into trying to pitch and get brand partnerships for my clients because I wanted to fund their events. For instance, I had some clients that were up-and-coming artists and they didn't have the money to put together a gallery, so I would reach out to companies to try to get them money to fund their events and help pay for my costs (as well). That's what let me into the (brand) partnerships world. I think what really separates Hometeam from other experiential agencies is that we do experiential and production as well as brand partnerships. A lot of agencies don't do that—so that added value that we provide to our clients is what I think separates us from the rest.

Transitioning into the advice side of things, what are some attributes or skills that you think will help someone excel in this industry?

I think relationship-building is really important. I don't like to say networking, because I think it is more about (fostering) real relationships with people—those are the ones that are going to take you further. It is not just checking in on people when you need something, and it's not just asking people business questions to further your agenda. It is really about getting to know people on a personal level. I think that is a huge skill set that people need to learn—just being personable and connecting with people. The more that you care about people, the more they are going to care about what you have going on, and the more that they are going to look out for you. There are a lot of times when a business opportunity might only half-way make sense, but if it's your homie or someone who cares about you and they see that you are working hard, they are more likely to find a way to make it work. Beyond that, I think dedication is important—knowing that you are going to hear “no” a thousand times before you hit that one “yes” (is key). You have to have the ability to hear “no” and keep going—I think that is one of the most important qualities for people to have in this industry.



Looking back at your personal journey in the industry, if you could give your younger self a piece of advice what would it be and why?

I would tell myself: “Stop being so hard on yourself.” I’m definitely my biggest critic and my own worst enemy. In the same lens of being okay with hearing “no” all the time, I think pushing through (is important). I constantly had some of those thoughts of, “Oh this isn't good enough.” Then I would ask my friends and they would say, “Oh no that's great!” or “That is amazing.” So I think my advice to my younger self would be: “Don't overcomplicate things, be your own advocate, and don't carry yourself down.” If you are constantly pulling and nagging at yourself, you are emptying your own thoughts and you need to be constantly pouring into it—especially if you are hearing “no” all the time when you are trying to pursue your dreams. Your cup has to have something in it. You are responsible for keeping that cup full and not looking at others to fill your cup. You have to fill it yourself.

JADA BROWN

Reporter | Sports Broadcaster



Photographs courtesy of Jada Brown (@jada5_4)

Born and raised in Las Vegas, Nevada, Jada Brown was surrounded by the world of sports from a very young age. It wasn't until she was 12 years old though, that she found her true love for the game of basketball. Fast-forward a few years, Jada had embarked on her collegiate career after earning an athletic scholarship to play basketball at the University of Kansas (KU). **During this time, she realized that she did not want to pursue a professional career in the game after graduation.** So she took a step back and reflected on her passions. She knew she loved to share her insights with others, and wanted to find a career path where she would still be surrounded by sports. It was during this time that she found reporting and sports broadcasting. **This was the perfect mix**—it kept her involved in the world of sports while providing her with the platform to interview other athletes. From there, Jada started her own interviewing show, hosted different athletic events at KU, and continued to network with fellow professionals in the industry. As she continued to strengthen her personal brand in sports reporting and broadcasting, Jada was a part of events such as the NFL Training Camp and NBA Summer League. **She hasn't stopped since.** Currently, she is working on sharing more content across her digital platforms and bringing unique insight to the industry.

During your time in college, you decided that you wanted to pursue a career in the world of sports off the court. Could you share more with us about what that process was like? What were some of the challenges that you faced along the way?

For me, it was important to make a decision about whether this, sports broadcasting, was something I really wanted to do. My freshman year I was like, "Okay, I really can't just do something for money. I have to decide what I like to do, and what job would be realistic for me to go after." That was the first step for me. I also thought (it was important) to seek help from other people. I was going to every career fair in Kansas, especially because I knew I wanted to go into sports reporting and Kansas is very well-known for basketball, their alumni, and people in the sports industry. So I made sure that whenever there was an opportunity that came up at school—job fairs, career fairs, or (guest speakers)—I was raising my hand, asking questions, and getting contacts no matter what. In doing that, I found a lot of connections, was able to pick people's brains, and start my own interviewing show. There, I was just getting one of my teammates, making up questions, and asking them things that were prevalent at the moment. I branched off from that and started interviewing a couple of men's players and ended up in football after their Director of Operations reached out to me. So I kept myself involved and never turned down any opportunity. There were times I was asked to do things I had no clue on how to do, but I acted like I did—that actually led to me hosting Midnight Madness. Now, we have one of the biggest Midnight Madness events in college basketball. They asked me to host this segment during the event and I was like, "Ummm, you know there is going to be like 16,000 people. I have never done anything in front of a camera or anything like that." They were like, "You will be fine. We want you to do it." So I just faked it until I made it. Honestly, I wasn't afraid to make mistakes. I wasn't afraid to take big opportunities, small opportunities. You can't have too much pride—you just have to be willing to learn because with reporting it's all about building your resume. You know, my brother is in the NBA, I went to Kansas, I was a college athlete, and I am still grinding to get to where I want to go. I think that is the realistic part of it—you will figure out if you love it or not and if it's really for you based off of what you are willing to sacrifice.

You touched on a great point earlier surrounding the importance of not only having a diverse skill set, but also embarking on experiences with a fearless mindset. Could you share more of your thoughts on the impact having that mentality has on one's success in the industry?

I think having confidence is key. When I was younger, I used to struggle with confidence—I was very timid, very soft-spoken, always wanted to be everybody's friend, and didn't want to bother people. A part of growing up and maturing (though), was discovering that you have to be open and willing to have confidence in whatever you are doing. No one is perfect. Once you realize that nobody is perfect, and that it is usually through your failures that you learn (the most), it allows you to get better. I think that is what young people need to hear: "It's okay to fail." If you are willing to work, go outside of yourself, and go beyond what other people are doing to get what you want, people recognize that. A lot of people are lazy. If you work hard and have confidence in what you are doing, a lot of things will come to you naturally. People see and recognize that (hard work).

As you continue to work on building your personal brand, what are some of the challenges that you have faced throughout this journey?

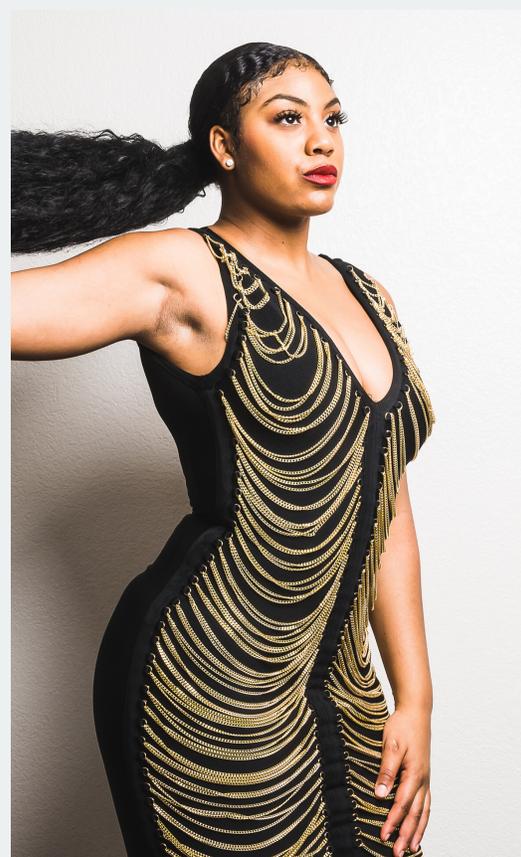
I think one of my biggest challenges has probably been consistency—because I am doing everything on my own. For me it's (about) trying to get a lot of content at once, that way I can sit on it and have (stuff) to put out. As opposed to someone that has like a camera crew or is with a network that reaches out to the athletes, I do all of that on my own. So I am writing my interviews, contacting people and seeing who I can get when, and then figuring out the (mode) of the interview—flying out for the interview, or conducting it via a Zoom call, or an IG live, etc. For me, I think the most challenging part is just doing everything on my own, organizing it, and staying consistent with it.

What inspires you? What are some things that have fueled you throughout your career to continue building your personal brand in the industry?

It's so funny because until I started doing this, I never realized "Oh, there aren't a lot of women that do this in sports. On top of that, there aren't that many black women that are sports reporters." It was just something I really loved doing. People kept coming to me and saying, "It's so good that you are doing this. We need more women that know what they are talking about. We need more black women." For me, it started to become bigger when I started having those conversations, and so a lot of my inspiration definitely comes from that. I feel like I have a bigger purpose with being a black woman in a male-dominated industry. I just feel like I have a platform to be able to use my voice, regardless of how big I go with my reporting or not, to be able to relate to people of color. That is important to me. I want to inspire the next generation. I want to have a lot of women, especially black women, represented in sports.

What are some pieces of advice that you would give to someone who is interested in pursuing a career in the sports industry?

Josina Anderson, who works at NFL Networks, told me this and it has always stuck with me. She said, "You have to have tunnel vision. You can't be looking left and right if you are going to go down the sports reporting career because you will get discouraged." So I would definitely say to have tunnel vision and don't compare your situation to anyone else's—because everybody's situation is different. I would also (tell them) to stay the course and not be outworked. You have different tools and platforms now. You have social media to use and expose yourself. You don't really need a "network" at this point, so to speak, you can literally start all on your own and build your own resume. Through it all, don't ever say "no" to an opportunity because you never know all the different areas that you might (get exposed to) and become interested in. Lastly, I would also say, keeping an open mind, keeping a supportive group of people around you, and always remembering why you are doing it, will help you be successful (in this industry). It might take a little while, but you will be successful.





BALLERS

T H E M A G A Z I N E

Sky's the limit, keep ballin'.