

# BALLIERS

SPORTS + BUSINESS + INSPIRATION

JUNE ISSUE

CONNOR  
MORGAN

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JENNY  
FISCHER

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ARIELLE  
CHAMBERS

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ROBYN  
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CHEYENNE  
PARKER...

NO LIMITS.





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# SUMMER SERIES

# JUNE 2020 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.

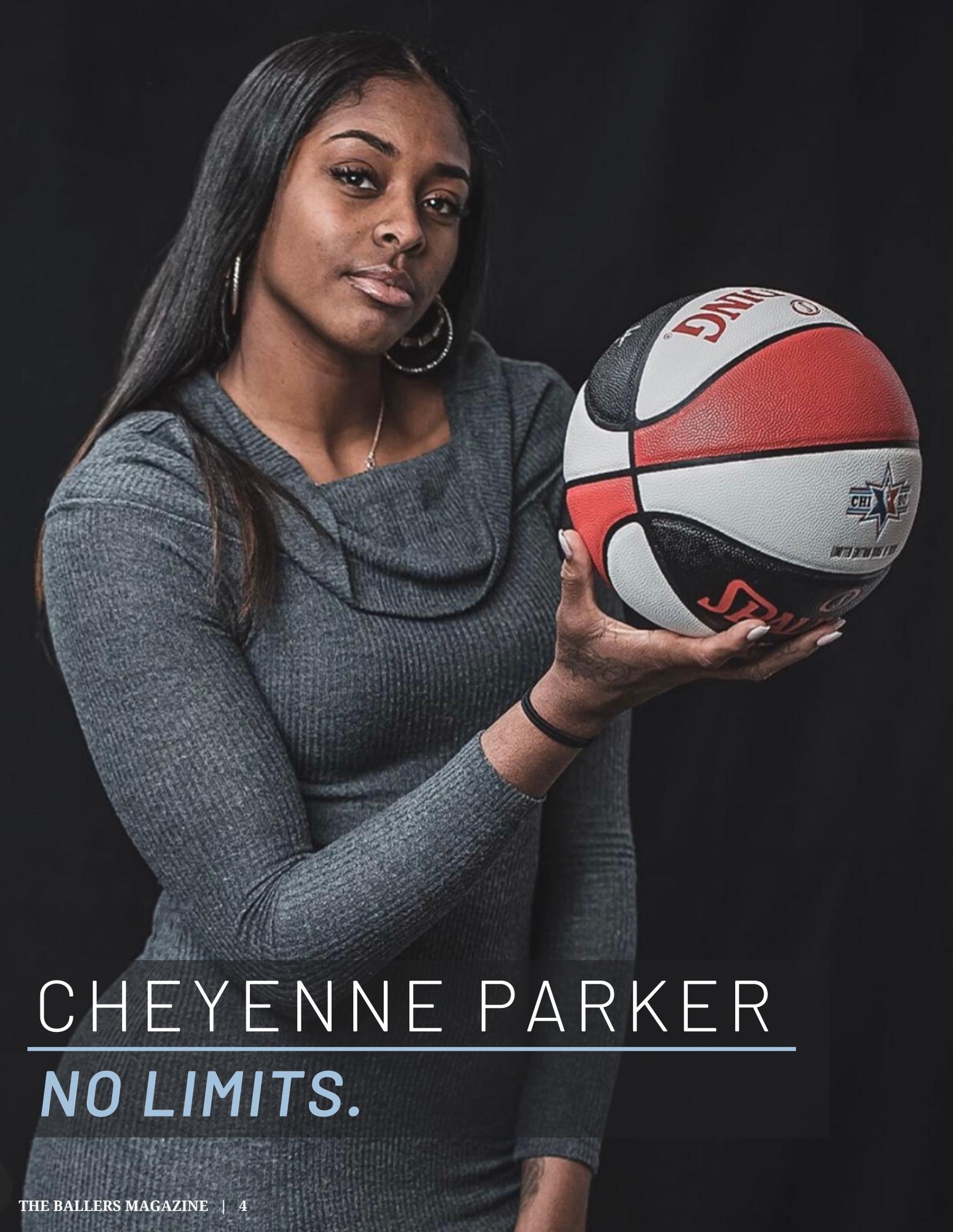
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like to see featured on our  
forthcoming issues.

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

*Sofi Dumont*

SOFI DUMONT  
Editor-in-Chief | @sofidumont





# CHEYENNE PARKER

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## NO LIMITS.



**With the odds stacked against her, she prevailed. And she did not just prevail, she SOARED!** This is the story of WNBA Chicago Sky's very own Cheyenne Parker—a Queens, New York native who discovered her true love for the game of basketball during her collegiate career. As she developed and strengthened her skills on the court, Cheyenne began thinking about life after college and her aspirations of playing in the WNBA. **But suddenly, everything she had worked so hard to build up, appeared to be crumbling down.** Just five games before the end of her senior season, Cheyenne was suspended from the team. Her collegiate career appeared to be over. From that point on, nobody expected her to get drafted. The possibility of her playing professionally in the league became more and more blurred by the headlines, articles, and stories surrounding her suspension. For Cheyenne though, this experience was a wake up call that tested her resilience and commitment to living out her dreams. **She continued to work. She continued to push forward.** Soon enough, she got the opportunity to become who she was destined to be all along. With the fifth pick in the 2015 WNBA Draft, Pokey Chatman and the Chicago Sky selected Cheyenne. **The second chance she had been waiting for was here, and she was ready to give it her all. The rest is history!** She is currently preparing for her sixth year in the league and has used her platform to pursue her passions for entrepreneurship and mentorship. **Her story embodies the importance of remembering that life has NO LIMITS. If you can believe it, you can see it!**

**How was your journey in basketball early on? What was that transition process like going from playing collegiate basketball to playing in the league?**

I never actually played a full year of basketball in high school. It was kind of a different process for me. I didn't start taking basketball seriously until I got to college. Once I was in college, I realized the potential I had when my coach told me that there were pro scouts from overseas that were looking at me. I was a sophomore in college at that time, and that was really when I started taking it more seriously and getting a lot more into it. I ended up getting drafted into the league (after college), and it definitely was a big transition—going from college to the pros. Just because once you get to the pros, it's like everyone was my size. I went from being the big girl (on the court) to being the little girl. It definitely took a lot of adjusting to that aspect and physicality (of the game).



“

...the biggest thing for me—that I have to make sure I never forget again—is that it is nothing outside of me that is what inspires and motivates me. It is from within me. It is my passion, my drive.”

- Cheyenne on the process of rediscovering her motivation and inspiration

Photographs courtesy of Cheyenne Parker (@1\_born\_queen)

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

This is such great timing for this interview, honestly, because this quarantine has been so hard for me. Just not being able to play ball. Going from ball being life—like literally being life, being my ultimate goal and everything—to it being taken away. It really hit home for me. It put me in a bad place for a little bit. I had just gotten to France when they announced everything, so I (only) got to play one game. It was really overwhelming for me. I literally didn't do anything for a few days and was so disappointed in myself. But, one thing I can say is that, that happening like that kind of gave me a different perspective on basketball. It helped me appreciate it because I was taking it for granted you know. I was comfortable. I was in the mood of just being an athlete and thinking that none of this could go anywhere, and look at this. It's like, it's gone. So I think throughout this quarantine, I have really built that love and appreciation for the game.

### **Who inspires you? What are some things that you are fueled by?**

My mother is my ultimate motivation. You know, (for as long) as I can remember, my main goal was to make sure that she didn't need anything. Just because of the way I saw her struggle growing up. She just literally has given everything that she had to me and my siblings. She is my ultimate motivation to this day. Since college, she was the reason I would go get extra shots up. She was my reason for it and she still is, but once I bought my mom a house and got her all settled, I kind of lost that desire, that drive, that hunger—because I was like “Oh okay, my mom is good now and she is happy.” So I would just kind of cruise. But that is not who I am, and I never have been that type of person. I had to kind of self re-evaluate and find out what else fueled me to work hard, continue playing, and to give it my all. I have been doing a lot of soul searching with that, and I think the biggest thing for me—that I have to make sure I never forget again—is that it is nothing outside of me that is what inspires and motivates me. It is from within me. It is my passion, my drive.



**Throughout your career you've done a lot to pay it forward. From basketball camps to your speaking tour recently, you have turned to mentoring as a way to connect with the youth. Could you share more with us about what mentoring means to you?**

Mentoring is really important to me because when I was their age, there weren't many outlets for that. Honestly, my coach in high school was my biggest mentor. I didn't have the mindset of playing (basketball) or even going to college at that time, and she made me believe that I could. She changed my mindset. (During those times), I really wished I had someone like myself in a position of success that was really giving back, talking to me, and teaching me things. You know, just kind of giving me a heads up for certain things. So that's what I am trying to do now for the youth, because I didn't have that. I want to be that (mentor) for other young ladies and young men.

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

It would definitely be to stay focused, don't get distracted, and stick to the goal. Let that be at the forefront of everything you do, every decision you make. The reason I would tell them that is because of my own past experiences from making really bad decisions, and not thinking about all the repercussions that could negatively impact my entire future. I would also tell young athletes to save thick skin. When I was in college, I had a tough coach, (and) those experiences have absolutely helped me be the player I am today. So I would tell them that they should take the message of what the coach is saying (as it is), and not how he or she is saying it.

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

If I could give a piece of advice to my younger self, I would tell myself: "Continue working on your weaknesses no matter how much you have to do." For example, in college I didn't have to shoot that many threes, so I didn't work on that as much. I would tell (my younger self): "Work on everything. Work on your dribbling, your shooting, every single day." I think I would (have) definitely enhanced my game now if I had been doing that since freshman year of college, instead of just sticking to what a post player was supposed to do.



# CONNOR MORGAN

*Sports Nutritionist*

Sports nutritionist, Connor Morgan, discovered her passion for health, wellness, and fitness in the most unconventional way. After graduating from college with a degree in Business Marketing, Connor decided to move to Los Angeles to begin her professional career. Shortly after starting her corporate job, she realized that she was unhappy, unfulfilled, and frustrated with the lifestyle she had. **This was her opportunity to step back and make a change. The chance to reflect on her passions and interests.** Connor began to brainstorm on the things that brought her joy, and quickly discovered that working out was at the top of that list. It was her break from the world. Her detox. The place that brought her peace of mind. After recognizing her interest in fitness, she began participating in bodybuilding competitions. Over the next three years, Connor collected an array of accolades and sponsorships with companies such as Quest Nutrition, Lenny & Larry's, and Nutrishop. **But soon enough, she was ready to take the next step. She was ready to raise the bar again.** It was during this time that Connor started honing in on her love for wellness, and pursued a certification in nutrition. **It was only up from there.** Currently, Connor is enrolled in several courses at the University of Minnesota studying Chinese medicine and herbalism. In the upcoming months, she is looking forward to embarking on two business ventures that revolve around her passion and love for nutrition and herbalism—**her incredible journey continues!**

*Photographs courtesy of Connor Morgan (@connormorgan)*

**From choosing to remain unsigned throughout your career in bodybuilding to embarking on an academic journey in herbal medicine now for your upcoming business venture, you have always been deeply involved in the area of entrepreneurship. What has that process been like for you?**

I love it! I am someone who, if there is something that I can learn and it is on something that I love, I am always going to (seek) to learn about it. I feel like life is a never-ending learning process. I love to learn. I find ways to educate myself on things that I love to do and that I love to research (about). I always say this, "If what you love to do you would do it for free, and could get paid to do it, that's how you know you're doing the right thing." That (quote) has translated with everything. With my fitness career. With my (focus on) sports nutrition. With my traveling. I can even relate it to that. For instance, I was traveling and doing that on my own dime. So if I could get paid to do it, why wouldn't I do it. That's where your calling is. That's where your purpose is. That's where your passion is. So being able to discover my love for holistic health and nutrition, and starting a business, has been so rewarding because I have been able to work (fully) towards my dream. And it wasn't until now, just this year, that I figured out the space I am in within the sports, fitness, and wellness (areas). I knew I wanted to be in that space all along, but I just didn't know what it was that I wanted to do. And it was in front of me all along. Like (for instance), I'm going to Whole Foods and I'm spending an hour in the nutrition aisle because I just love to read (about) what's in stuff, where it was manufactured in, etc. If I'm enjoying doing that in my free time, then that's how I know that I am doing the right thing now in wanting to get paid for it. It is my purpose. It's what I was (destined) to do. It is also what I am certified and qualified to do. So (that's why) I think entrepreneurship is a never-ending learning curve; but in the end, as long as it is something you believe in, are passionate about, and you know is your purpose, then it's worth it. I always tell people, "You know something is your purpose if it resonates with your soul." So everything that I have been doing up until this point, it resonates with my soul, and I know I am on the right path.



**"IF WHAT YOU LOVE TO DO YOU WOULD DO IT FOR FREE, AND COULD GET PAID TO DO IT, THAT'S HOW YOU KNOW YOU'RE DOING THE RIGHT THING."**

*— Connor's motto to discovering one's passions, career path, and purpose*

**In terms of inspiration, what are some things that inspire you? What are some things that fuel you throughout your journey?**

I think seeing how the state of the world is right now, with the coronavirus, is inspiring me to want to come out with the products and businesses that I am launching because people need help within the health and wellness space. So I am inspired by the opportunity to help others live a healthier life through my education in these areas. For example, seeing how much people can influence one another with a single post on (a platform) like Instagram inspires me. When I post something and I get DMs from people saying, "Thank you so much, I wasn't aware of that" or "I needed to hear that today," that lets me know that I am doing my job. It lets me know that I should keep doing what I am doing because it's helping others. Even if it's helping just one person. That inspires me.

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

I would say to my younger self: "It is okay to follow your dreams and not your parents." I feel like for me, for the longest time, the reason why I worked my nine-to-five was because I wanted to make my dad proud. I don't think I mentioned it (throughout our interview), but my dad is a preacher. I am a preacher's daughter. So I feel like everything I chose (growing up) was to make my dad proud. From the college I chose, I chose it because my dad went there. My degree in Business Marketing, I chose that to make my dad proud. So if I could reflect back (on my personal journey), I would tell my younger self: "It is okay to follow your own dreams because, at the end of the day, you are the one that has to wake up and love what you do. You are the one that has to wake up and go to work. Trust yourself. Follow your dreams."

**What has been your favorite memory working in the fitness and wellness space within the sports industry thus far? Any favorite collaborations?**

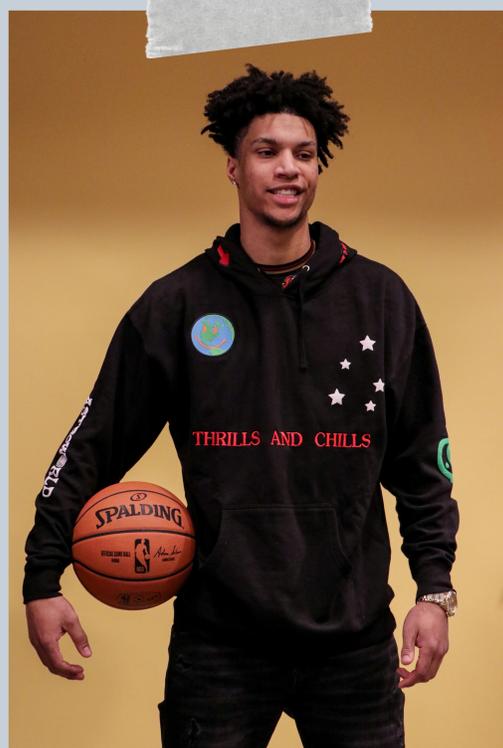
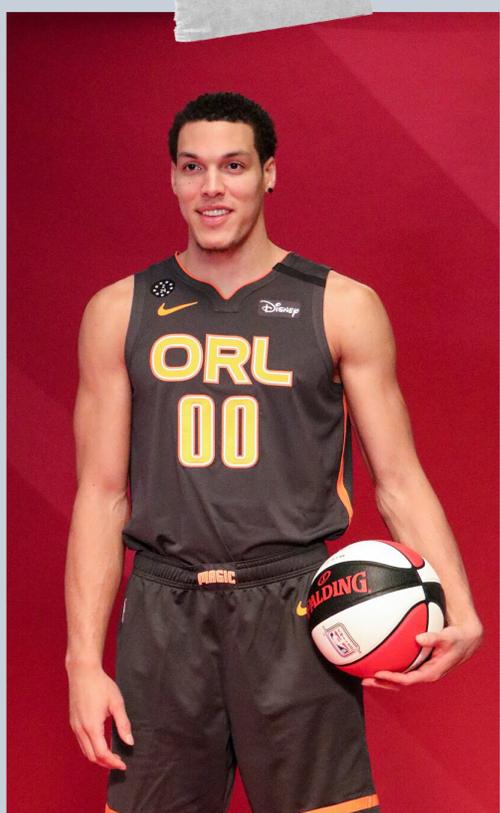
I would say working with Adidas. I have worked with them at various events and activations (in the past) and currently am working with them (as well), and I just love anything that I do with them. I am so Team Three Stripes. I love the company, their business ethics, how they run their company, and who they have running their company. I think they are extremely intelligent and they apply to the average person. Anything that they do, any event that they host, it is so all-inclusive. People who aren't even in the fitness arena or are "experts" (in that space), they come out and join their events. I love that everyone can feel like they are included. Whether you are a peer in the fitness industry or someone who just wants to attend an event, you are part of their movement. I really love everything that they do.



**What is a piece of advice that you would give to someone who is interested in pursuing a similar career path within the sports nutrition and wellness space?**

I would say to (strive) to find what you specifically love to do within the sports nutrition or wellness arena as soon as you can. That way, you can target your audience according to that space. So really figuring out what you are passionate about and what drives you within that (space) is important. For example, if someone says, "I want to be a fitness trainer." What does that mean? What is your purpose in wanting to do that? Who do you want to help? How did you have that idea? That way, by focusing on what it is within the space that they want to do, I think people will be able to find their niche audience and connect with them directly. Everything is a process, of course, but being able to identify this early on will allow you to build your following, (curate) your brand, and get clients sooner.

# DUMONT MEDIA



Capturing unforgettable moments while building memories that will last a lifetime.

# JENNY FISCHER

*Digital & Social Media | NCAA*



*Photographs courtesy of Jenny Fischer (@jennylynnfisch)*

From both of her parents playing basketball at Marquette University to her older brother playing the sport at the collegiate level, Jenny Fischer has been surrounded by the game of basketball her entire life. For this Hartland, Wisconsin native, the possibility of transforming her passion for sports into a full-time career became a reality when she was just 12 years old. After watching Erin Andrews sideline reporting during a Green Bay Packers game, it all clicked for Jenny. **She could do this. She could tie in her love for basketball and storytelling, and pursue a career in the sports industry.** Fast-forward a few years, and Jenny was starting her career in sports at Marquette University. Not only did she work closely with the men's and women's basketball teams within the digital media space during her time at Marquette, but she also held a total of seven internships over her collegiate career. **Talk about impressive! And her story doesn't end there.** After graduating with a major in Journalism and minor in Digital Media, Jenny has continued her career in the industry at the NCAA. From creating digital content to managing the organization's social media platforms, she has worked with the women's basketball and soccer teams throughout her year long, post-graduate program at the NCAA. As her time there comes to an end, Jenny is excited to continue using her passion and love for creative storytelling to share athletes' stories with the world. **The best is yet to come!**

**You fostered an incredible professional platform throughout your collegiate journey at Marquette, which led to your job now with the NCAA. Could you share with us a little more about your role in the organization and the process you went through to receive this position?**

In August, going into my senior year at Marquette, I got a Twitter DM from someone that said, "Hey! I work at the NCAA. I have followed you on Twitter for quite some time, and have seen the stuff that you do—especially with the Big East. I am really impressed. I think you should apply for this position (at the NCAA) because I think you would have a really good chance of getting it." For me I was like, "Wow! I don't even know this person and they believe in me like that?! I'm going to do it. I am going to apply." So I applied, went through the process, and it got down to the last two people. After the in-person interview, I got the call saying that I didn't get the position. I started thinking, "Ok, that door is closed. I will be okay, I am happy that I applied for it. It wasn't meant to be and I will find what's meant for me." Then, a week later, they called me and said they wanted me to come to Indianapolis in June and start working for the (organization). For me, it was a no brainer. I love college athletics, I love college basketball in particular, and could (definitely) see myself connecting well with people in the NCAA. This position is a year long, post-graduate program in the digital and social media side of things. I have gotten to travel a ton in this role. I flew out directly to the College World Series in Omaha, then went on a site visit to California for the Women's Soccer National Championship, and then attended the three-week Women's Basketball Road Trip—which has been the peak of my time here and my life because I am totally a hoops head. Like I said, having the opportunity to interview some of the top players and coaches around the country was something I never pictured myself doing until they asked me to. Just getting to share the stories of so many student-athletes with the world and celebrating the positive impact of sports communities (with others) has made this year one of the best years of my life. I have learned more than I have ever learned in a year before, and I am just really grateful for my time at the NCAA.

**Because of the pandemic, your role within the organization has transformed a bit. What has been the biggest challenge you've faced throughout this process of adapting to a new role? How have you worked to overcome it?**

One of my biggest challenges has been people thinking that all I do is on-camera work, and then I get boxed into being just a reporter. There is absolutely nothing wrong with people who are reporters and who solely do that, but for me it was like, "I have so much more to offer." I never want to be boxed in because if I can only tell a story in one way and that's on a camera, then am I really a storyteller at all? I want to be able to write. I want to be able to do this across different mediums and different platforms in the way that's best serving the story itself and whatever person (the story is about). I know that kind of sounds like a weird challenge, but for me, proving to people that I am not just an on-camera person and that I am outside that (box) is something that I work towards. I think social media has allowed me to (overcome this challenge). I can use it to share the dope graphics that I have designed. I can link pieces of work that I have created. I can really use it as a (platform) to highlight my skills within the storytelling (and creative) space.

**How have you fostered your tribe in the industry?**

I am stocked about the time period that we are in in terms of women in sports being very much on the up and up, especially women of color. I think diversifying this industry is much needed and it is a long-time needed. Especially because, like we talk (about) at the NCAA, the people who are playing these sports need to be represented by people who look like them on the administrative side. For me, I think I am just trying to be in the same room as people who are smarter than me and who are an extra level up than me because that is where I am going to learn the most. That's why, as far as my tribe in collegiate athletics and the sports media realm goes, I feel like I have so many different people that have been in my corner. What I am really grateful for at the NCAA, for instance, has been the chance I have gotten to meet some of the top college basketball coaches in the country—especially on the women's side. So (having the chance) to connect with genuine people has really allowed me to build my tribe in the industry, since those are the people that care about me as a person and not just because of what I do. That's kind of the people I surround myself with—people that will make me better and hopefully I can make better as well.

**What is a piece of advice that you would give to someone interested in pursuing a similar career path within the sports industry?**

One of my first bits of advice would be: "Don't force anything." Try to search after what you think is meant for you. I think a lot of times people see cool jobs in sports and they are just like "I want to do that"—and that's great, but why do you want to do that? Is it because of your passion within this area of sports? Or your love for that area of the industry? Sometimes I think people who are fans of certain teams or sports want to get into the industry because they think they love it, but fandom is so far different than wanting to make something better. That's why for me I would say, "Don't force it. Look for what you are passionate about and figure out how you can align that into what you do." The more and more your work and play can be inseparable, the more fulfilling your life is. For instance, for me, I enjoy what I do so much that it makes me sad when I am not interviewing some of the student-athletes. Figuring out your why and making sure it aligns with what you are pursuing in this industry is one of the biggest points I can make. Also I would say, "Be yourself." Be as genuine, graceful, and gracious as you can on top of that too because you never know where this incredible industry is going to lead you to.



**“Keep showing up!” is my absolute favorite quote. The credit goes to Des Linden. Like (she said), “Some days it will feel like you are trudging through hell. Other days it will feel like you are born to do it. No matter what, you give it your best shot. You keep showing up.”**

*-Jenny on her life motto*

# ARIELLE CHAMBERS

*Social Producer & Talent | Bleacher Report*



Photographs courtesy of Arielle Chambers (@ariivory)

For Arielle (Ari) Chambers, the game of basketball has been a big part of her life from a very young age. Born and raised in Raleigh, North Carolina, Ari recalls going to women's basketball games at North Carolina State University, traveling with her best friend's AAU team, and connecting with professional basketball players throughout her school field trips. She was intrigued by the game, inspired by the athletes, and passionate about the opportunity to share their stories.

**The world of sports was in her DNA.** As she embarked on her career in New York as a professional cheerleader, Ari quickly discovered the lack of media coverage in women's basketball. **It was at this moment, where everything changed for her.** She was determined to shine light on the amazing athletes that played the game that meant so much to her. The game that, growing up, shaped who she was. Using her genuine love and passion for basketball as her driving force, Ari began to create content that highlighted these incredible women. From articles to online interviews to digital content, she began to foster a platform that recognized and celebrated female athletes. **She hasn't looked back ever since.** To this day, Ari continues to authentically share athletes' stories and use her platforms to push for greater recognition of women in sports. **The best part of it all is...she is just getting started!**

**Could you take us through your journey in college? What was that process of entering the “professional world” and pursuing a full-time career in sports like?**

I had a really unconventional way that I navigated college. I started off at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte trying to be a teacher, on a teaching fellow scholarship, and then I actually dropped out of school. I moved to New York, modeled for a couple of months, and then jumped back into school. I went to North Carolina State University and cheered there, which was actually my lifelong dream. I ended up completing my degree in Communications and Media Studies there and also got a degree in English from Oxford University. Basically (once I graduated), I utilized what I was really good at—which was writing, talking to people, and making relationships—and implemented (that) into my professional career. I moved back up to New York, still was modeling, but was on the cheering squad for the New York Knicks, the Rangers, and the Liberty. When I was on the cheering squad for the NY Liberty which was called the Torch Patrol, I saw my friends (who were on the team) not getting coverage. I was like, “Why aren't they getting coverage? I don't necessarily understand why these are olympians playing at Madison Square Garden, and nobody is writing about it. The top 144 athletes play at MSG, and nobody is caring about it?!” I wanted to put my talent towards that, so I started as a sports writer for High Post Hoops. From there, as I built my credibility up, I would then conduct interviews with my friends before and after their games and would just post those on my YouTube and Twitter. It really all just grew from there.

**How was that transition process (especially after graduating college) of working with websites, blogs, and sports platforms to highlight all the different talent in the industry?**

I did it my way. It was pretty much a seamless transition because it was something I was working on off of passion. I never really had “guidelines” or “communication structures” that I followed. My whole purpose was to grow the game because I knew how much it had shaped my life growing up, and I wanted to give that back. I didn't play basketball—I was a professional cheerleader—, so this was my way of giving back to the game that gave me so much.

**Throughout your career, you have worked and collaborated with an array of organizations leading up to your position with Bleacher Report today. Could you take us through that process of developing your career in the industry?**

Yes, definitely! I first started (my career) with High Post Hoops and then I did some freelance work with the WNBA. A lot of people don't know that I worked for the league office, but I actually did some voice-overs for them, digital news hostings, and more. I really wanted to dabble in everything, get my feet wet (in the industry), and connect with people in that office. In addition to that, I have done a lot of personal things with the WNBA—especially throughout their rebranding process. Having that opportunity, to serve as a resource and liaison between the league and the community, has allowed me to continue working on amplifying the players' voices which was extremely important to me. All of these collaborations were the culmination of experiences that led me to Bleacher Report. Doug Bernstein actually found me on Twitter and was like, "Hey! Do you want a job growing this women's platform the same way that you would grow your own, but it would be solely focused on women's sports. It doesn't have to just be basketball. I want it to be your voice, I want you to build it the way you see fit, and we're going to be pretty much hands off." That was interesting to me because as much as I love the WNBA, I am also a cheerleader, so to utilize that (platform) to highlight other sports such as cheerleading, volleyball, gymnastics, and soccer was awesome. So I have been responsible for growing this platform literally from the ground up using my passion for storytelling. I love telling stories and nothing has really changed there, it's just that now I'm doing it on a larger scale and have help from Bleacher Report and a production team. Throughout this journey, I really (have learned) that if you move off of your passion and continue to do things in a very real way, your audience will build itself.

**You are extremely passionate about women empowerment in sports and paying it forward to other young girls that aspire to enter the industry. What are your sources of motivation behind this?**

Terri Jackson from the WNBPA was my aha-moment. She said, "If you are the only woman in the room, that's not something to celebrate. That is problematic. We need to get past trying to be the 'only one' or the 'first one'. You look to your left, you look to your right, and none of your sisters are there?! Why not? You have to be the changemakers in that." That's why I encourage people to support each other, because I think we are in a society that is making us believe that only one of us can exist in these spaces. It's super competitive, super cutthroat, and I want to break (down) that narrative. I want to completely shatter it because there is room for us all. I feel like as long as you are equipped in the way where you know the sport, you know what you want to do, and you know how you are going to deliver it, there should be no reason why you should feel like you are competing with your sister(s). It just doesn't make sense to me. We are here to help each other, support one another, and pay it forward.

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

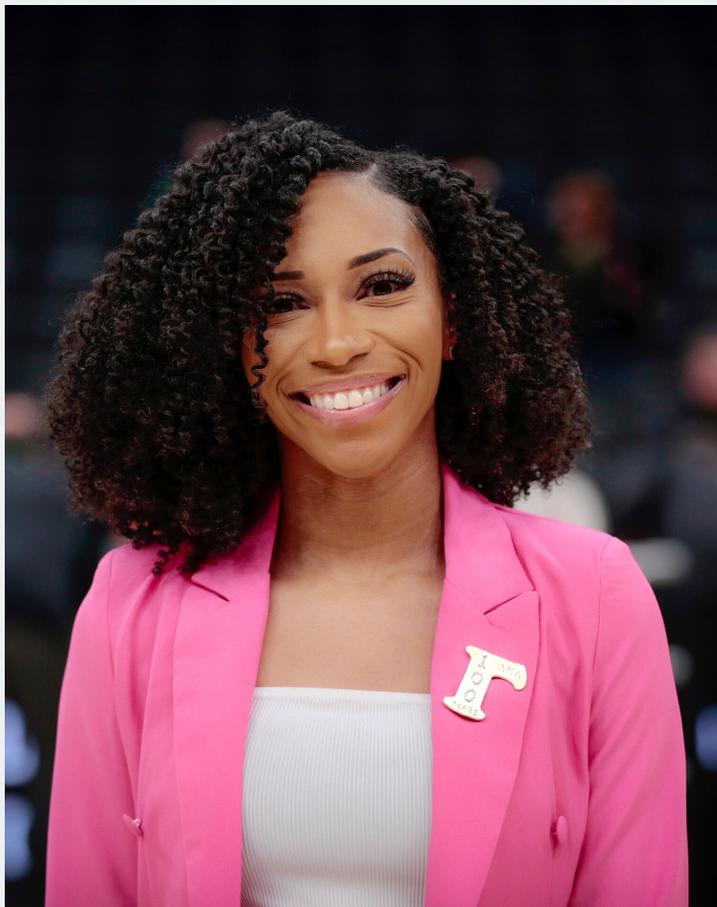
That's a really good question! I would say: "Stop second-guessing yourself because everything (that) you are doing is for a reason." There was a time when someone told me I was 'unpolished', and at that time, it devastated me. But then I was like, "You know what, I have two degrees. I can work and perform my butt off. I am good at what I do." So even though it wasn't that long ago, I would just tell my early-twenties self, "Just calm down, don't cry, it's going to work out for you. Keep doing what you are doing, the way you want to do it, because God got you. He has a journey already written (for you) that you don't even expect, and it is far greater than you could ever imagine."

**What is a piece of advice that you would give to someone interested in entering the industry? Any skills or experiences that you think could prepare them to excel in this space?**

I think that, no matter what, you need to know how to write. That is a skill that a lot of people don't realize is (important) in this industry. As far as working for an organization such as Bleacher Report or a comparative company, I would say: "Be the full package." Know how to not only be on camera, but also know how to program, shoot, edit, produce—showcase the things you can bring (to the table). I think a lot of people don't realize that they have all the tools that they need right in front of them. Use your camera, your social media, and your platforms to build your brand and what you want. And (through it all), make sure that what you present online—what you build your brand around—is something that you can upkeep and stay consistent (with).



## ROBYN NEAL

*Digital Marketing | Boston Celtics*

*Photographs courtesy of Robyn Neal (@robynmneal)*

From playing an array of sports growing up to attending one of the nation's biggest sports schools, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), Robyn Neal knew she wanted to pursue a career in the industry from a very young age. **It wasn't until her time at UIUC though, that she discovered her true passion within the space.** After graduating with a degree in Sports Broadcasting, Robyn was excited to take the next step and begin her career in the industry. Although it was extremely difficult to find a job within the media space upon graduation, she was determined to live out her dreams of working in the sports industry. **After one year, she got her chance!** She moved to Bristol, Connecticut and joined the ESPN production team. From editing to control room management to re-airs, Robyn learned the ins and outs of production throughout her time at ESPN. After three years, Robyn was ready to take the next step. Although she wanted to stay in sports, she knew that she was interested in working for a team to be able to create content in that arena. **It has all been a movie ever since.** Over the past five months, Robyn has tapped into her passion for creative storytelling and created content for one of the league's most legendary teams, the Boston Celtics—and this is only the beginning!

**You are currently working with the Celtics within the digital marketing space. What was that transition from sports broadcasting to sports marketing like? What are some challenges that you have encountered?**

Going from college straight to ESPN was kind of within the same realm of my career—broadcasting and producing for television and digital. When it comes to being on the marketing side now, I think some people don't necessarily understand that marketing directly ties (with) social media—being that the ads that we create for social media are sponsored. For me, as a digital marketer, that is the space that I am in. I am focusing on creating content for our brand, while also figuring out ways (for) that content to be marketable and sold to another company. One of my main challenges, and one thing that I always try to speak about is representation. That is huge for me. I am working for a team that consists of a lot of athletes that look like me, so I think it is very important to have people that are behind the scenes—making those content decisions and coming up with those (digital) ideas—be able to understand the culture and background of the people they are creating content about. Right now, I am one of the few (people) that look like me that work for the company. I would say that's the biggest challenge: having to be the voice or help those around me to understand culturally how things may come across when I am the only one that looks like me in a room. That can be pretty difficult to explain and navigate. For me, trying to be as direct as possible and not being scared to speak up has definitely helped me navigate those waters.

**Let's talk about curating your personal brand! In addition to working with the Celtics, you have also built your personal brand off the court. Could you share more with us about the power of personal branding in the industry?**

Yes! Personal branding is so important. Your personal brand speaks for you before your resume speaks for you, and that is on every aspect. What you are posting on social media, what you are passionate about, the views that you vocally talk about, and (more). All of that matters. Your personal brand is really what can make or break you, what can get you opportunities, and what can open doors for you. It is so important. What you are doing personally, not just for the company that you work for, is what really speaks about your character, your work ethic, and your drive—especially during times like this (with the pandemic) where there is a lot of uncertainty.

## What are you driven or inspired by throughout this journey?

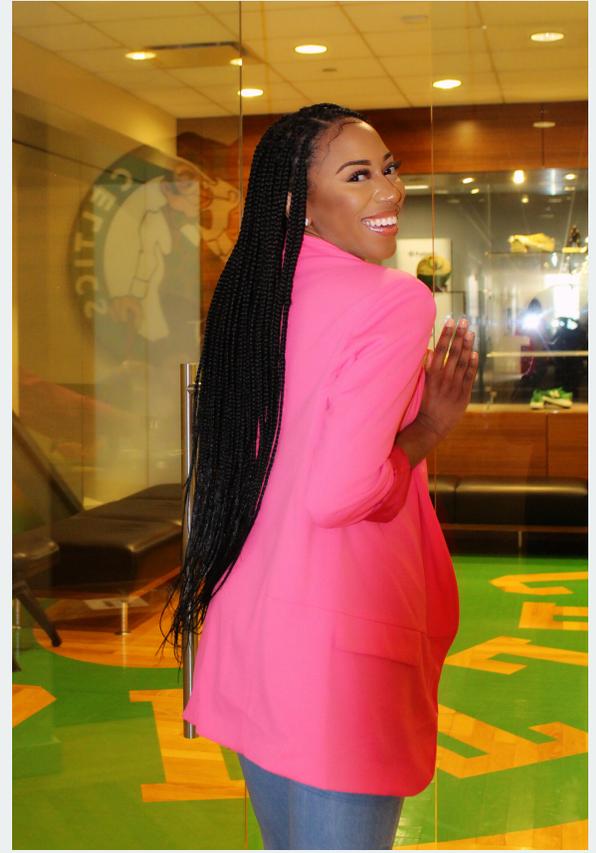
I love Chicago. I probably have said that numerous times (during this interview), but I think people really know that. I love my city. I think there is always this negative view on Chicago and a common misconception about the city that is just not the case. There are so many great people from the city that are doing amazing things every day—(advocating) for social justice, organizing initiatives for the youth, creating non-profit organizations, and more. It's just amazing the amount of work that I see people doing in the city that the media doesn't even look at because they want to paint us out to be a certain type of way. That is something that I know I am truly passionate about and keeps me going—because yes I do work a nine-to-five within sports, but I am very passionate about the youth and my city. I want to make sure I am being the best I can be so that (it) creates opportunities for people that look like me or people that want to do things just like I am doing. Even during this time, I have created a series on Instagram Live called "For The Culture," where I am basically interviewing people that have impacted the culture in some way, shape, or form. Whether that is through music, social work, their craft as an actor or athlete, whatever the case may be. It is really (a chance) to let the youth know that this is possible—that these are people that look just like you, coming from the neighborhoods that you come from, and that if you really want it you can go after it. This is definitely something that keeps me going and is something I can work on for hours without growing tired (of it). It really is something that I am passionate about and makes my heart smile.

## What is a piece of advice that you would give to someone who is interested in pursuing a similar career in sports?

Start early! Really, just start as early as you possibly can. We have phones with cameras that are insane. While you are in college and you are around these athletes or in the sports realm at your school, conduct interviews, leverage social media, create content that you want, just set the time to experiment. You are not at a job, so you can truly create what you want and post it online. You just have to not be afraid of what people are going to say. Take a risk and bet on yourself because ultimately you are what you have. Be confident. Don't be afraid of creating things that are outside of the norm because someone is going to see it, identify with it, and like it. Especially with the evolution of social media, starting early is important. We have everything right at our fingertips. We just have to do it. Stop waiting on someone to give you a chance and create that opportunity for yourself. Create what you like.

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

That's a good question! Aside from starting early and taking a risk on myself, I would probably say building the connections earlier too. We had LinkedIn back then, we had social media. I think I could have done a better job of reaching out to people at different companies, not just once I was graduating and needed a job, but trying to foster those relationships while I was still in college. In this way, people could have seen what I was creating, they could have given me advice on what I was creating, and I could have become better while I was still in school. So I would really just tell my (younger) self: "Take advantage of all the opportunities that are presented, make those connections early, and don't be afraid to try new things."



**“We just have to do it. Stop waiting on someone to give you a chance and create that opportunity for yourself. Create what you like.”**

*-Robyn on the importance of starting early in sports*

# GAME PLAN.

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IN CONTROL OF YOUR DESTINY. CONTINUE  
TO REACH HIGHER AND DREAM BIGGER.  
YOU ARE BOUND FOR GREATNESS!

**YOU GOT THIS.**



# BALLERS

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T H E M A G A Z I N E

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