

# BALLERS

SPORTS + BUSINESS + MOTIVATION

JULY ISSUE

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## ANDRE DRUMMOND RAISING THE BAR



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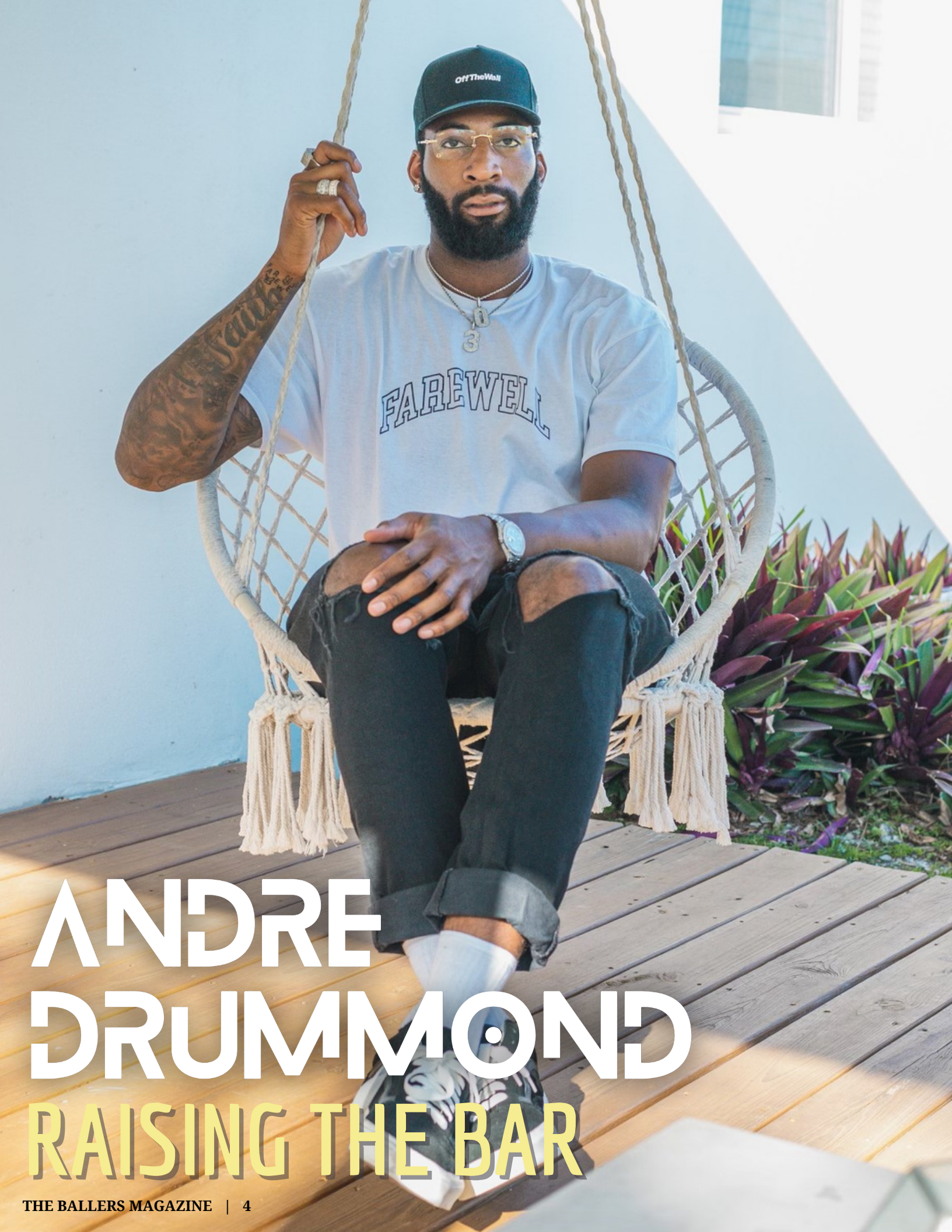
*Sky's the limit,  
keep ballin'.*

*Sofi Dumont*

SOFI DUMONT  
Editor-in-Chief | @sofidumont







# ANDRE DRUMMOND RAISING THE BAR



Andre Drummond became immersed in the world of basketball at a very early age. Growing up in Middletown, Connecticut, Andre remembers being first introduced to the game by his Uncle Phil (Santavenere), and quickly falling in love with it. From the competitiveness it brought out of him and his two cousins during their backyard matchups to the opportunities it could provide for him and his family, he was completely fascinated by every aspect of the sport. Determined to play the game at the highest level, Andre embarked on a journey of his own. Little did he know, but over the next few years, he would begin to build a legacy in the industry that would stand the test of time. As he began his high school career at Capital Preparatory Magnet School, Andre elevated his skills on the court and expanded his knowledge of the game. **He was on a mission.** He was determined to work day in and day out to achieve his dreams of playing in the NBA. After his sophomore year, Andre transferred to St. Thomas More in Oakdale, Connecticut—where he continued his incredible high school basketball career and became one of the most dominating centers in the class of 2011. Upon graduating from St. Thomas More, Andre embarked on his collegiate career at the University of Connecticut and played a season there before declaring for the draft. **Throughout that time, he kept his eyes on the prize.** He continued to embrace every opportunity to strengthen his basketball IQ and perfect his craft. Before he knew it, the opportunity he had been working towards since he was a kid was here, and he was ready. With the ninth pick in the 2012 NBA Draft, the Detroit Pistons selected Andre. He had done it. He had achieved his childhood dreams of playing in the NBA. **He hasn't looked back since!** From earning two NBA All-Star selections to being a four-time NBA rebounding leader, Andre has continued to leave his mark on the game over the past nine seasons in the league. He doesn't just stop there. Beyond the court, he has also pursued an array of personal ventures surrounding music, fashion, and philanthropy. Most recently, Andre launched "Farewell"—a clothing brand that shines light, celebrates, and embraces the journey of personal growth and transformation one goes through in life. As he continues raising the bar, Andre remains committed to inspiring the next generation to pursue their dreams fearlessly and relentlessly. **One thing is for certain: there's no limit to where he can take it!**



*Photographs courtesy of Andre Drummond (@andredrummondd)*





**Let's talk about your journey early on! You had an incredible high school career—where you earned an array of accolades, including a gold medal with Team USA. Tell us a little bit more about what that experience was like for you.**

Yeah! Playing USA Basketball at such a young age, for the junior team, was such a crazy experience for me. You know, I was a kid from Connecticut. Nobody had really heard of anyone out of Connecticut besides Marcus Camby and Vin Baker—in (terms of) big name guys that played in the NBA. So for me to be the next best thing to come out was crazy because nobody spoke about Connecticut. Just that feeling of being on such a big stage at such a young age, and carrying that load for the city of Middletown of being the next star, was such an incredible feeling for me. After playing there, that is kind of how my stardom began. People started to know who I was. People started to pay attention to my game more. Moving forward from there, I started getting national looks, my AAU game started becoming more looked at nationally, and I had every college you could think of come watch me play. So freshman year (of high school) was kind of the start of Andre Drummond, and who Andre Drummond is. I became the No. 1 player, and continued that throughout all my four years of high school. I started at Capital Preparatory Magnet School—I definitely have to shout them out—before transferring to St. Thomas More, where I won a national championship. Eventually, I ended up graduating high school early and going to the University of Connecticut.



**As you embarked on your collegiate career at the University of Connecticut (UCONN), what were some challenges that you faced early on? How did you work to overcome them?**

So it's crazy. My story at UCONN was definitely a different one because I decided to go there so late that I didn't get a chance to have that preseason with the team and build that camaraderie with everybody. When I got there, I kind of just got right to it—just trying to play and get used to my teammates. One of the challenges I had, with not having that summer workout that those guys had before starting the season, was that I was still in high school mode. I didn't decide until late August that I was going to go to the University of Connecticut. My plan was to go back to my high school again, but I ended up changing my mind. So I was still in that high school and AAU mode. I didn't have that man's mentality when it came to basketball. You know, I went from playing 16- and 17-years-olds in high school to 21-year-old guys. It was a lot different. When I started playing (in college), I found it very difficult to get adjusted because I was always a step behind. It

took me some time to really build up the courage to ask for help because I was at such a loss. I ended up working really close with Kevin Ollie and Kevin Freeman. It came down to just watching some film, lifting more in the gym, and getting extra work in at night when nobody was watching—just doing all the necessary things to become what I am now, a pro basketball player. You know learning from those guys really helped me a lot, and as I moved throughout the season, I ended up having a better end of the year. We made it to the tournament, had the early exit against Iowa State, but all in all it was a great learning year for me as a player.





**We have to talk about Draft Night! You were selected by the Detroit Pistons with the ninth pick in the 2012 NBA Draft. What was that moment like of hearing your name being called and achieving your dreams of playing in the NBA?**

I recall that moment so vividly, and every time someone asks me this question it always brings a smile to my face. That day was just such a weird one for me. I was told I was going higher up in the Draft, so as a kid, you know you get excited to hear that you are going Top 5. The numbers started going by—one, two, three...six, seven, eight—, and then I got that call from Detroit right after the eighth pick went. Just the emotions that went through my body is something I can't explain. You know coming from nothing—being a kid that was always told that I couldn't make it or wasn't good enough to do it—, and even having that self doubt at times (yet) continuing to fight for a dream that you want more than anything, for it to come to light is just an overwhelming feeling. Just hearing my name being called, seeing the excitement on my mom's face, and going on stage to shake David Stern's hand was an incredible feeling.







**As you embarked on this new chapter and transitioned into the league, what were some challenges that you faced there? How did you work to overcome them?**

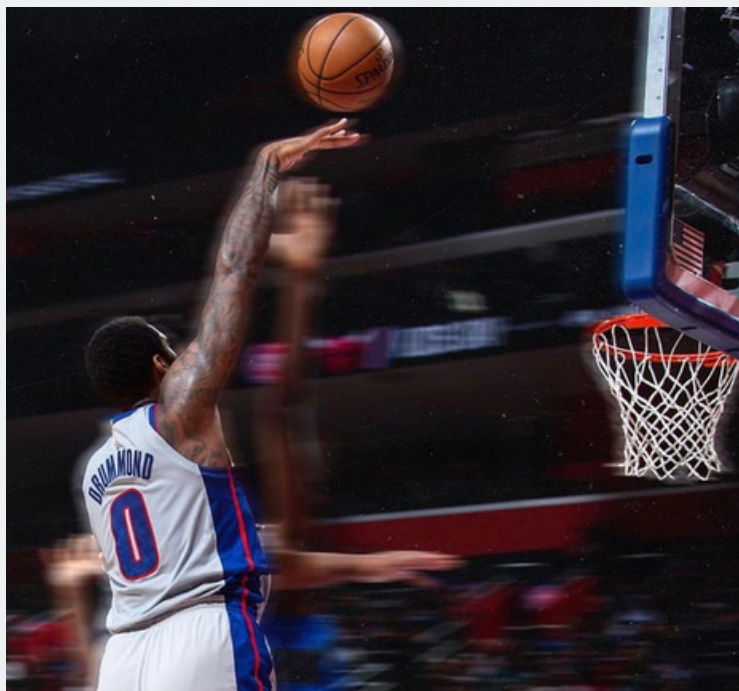
You know, it was about stepping up again. Coming from college where I was playing these 20-, 21-, 22-year-old guys, I transitioned to playing guys in their late-20s and in their 30s in the NBA. As someone who was 18-years old stepping into this game, it was like, “How do I fit in? Where?” I didn’t realize how big I was until the first game of the season. I was standing next to some of these guys that I used to watch on TV and play in video games, and I noticed that height (advantage). A little bit of underlying confidence started to build inside of me from there. It was like, “Alright, I am a little bit bigger than these guys. I might not be as strong as them, but I am definitely bigger than them and a lot faster than some of these guys.” So I found a way to make opportunities available for my team—which took me back to rebounding. I was actually having this conversation with my AAU coaches, J.R. Hargreaves and Patrick Sullivan, where I asked them a couple of days before training camp: “You know, I have never been here before. I don’t have any guys to lean on. It is just me out here. What do I do to be impactful for a team?” It was one of the realest conversations I have had because hearing those things as a kid put life into perspective for me. Just hearing them telling me: “The things that you were doing in high school may change. You need to be able to do some of the stuff you have done, but your whole game is probably going to change. In less than twenty-four hours, you are going to be doing things that you have never done before.” I think their advice for me of finding an area of my game that I was very, very good at already, perfecting it, being the best at it, and becoming known for it stuck with me. I remember my first week of training camp just having that in my head. It was like, “Alright, find something you are great at and perfect it.” Obviously, as a 7-foot kid, I didn’t get drafted to be a scorer or shoot threes. I came in to be a defender for the team—you know, block shots and get rebounds. For me, when I came in after that week of training camp, it was about being the best defensive guy. Come to find out, I wasn’t very good at it either because I didn’t know anybody’s game and how to play pick and roll defense quite yet (\*laughs\*). It was a learning experience for me. So I was like, “Ok, we’ll come to that later. I am really good at rebounding though, and I enjoy doing it, so what if I become the best rebounder of all-time?” This was me talking to myself and saying these things in my head. From that day forward, I made a pact to myself that I wouldn’t go a game under ten rebounds. You know I told myself, “You are never going to finish a game under ten rebounds. If you do, it is either because A) you are in foul trouble or B) you just didn’t play that much. But if you are on the floor, you should never get under ten rebounds.” Ever since that day, I just went after it. I wanted it more than everybody else. I wanted to be known for that reason. I know there are so many people (in the league) that are known for so many things—Steph Curry: one of the best three-point shooters of all-time, Chris Paul: one of the best point guards there is, LeBron James: best overall guy in the NBA, Tim Duncan and Kevin Garnett: best forwards in the game, Shaq: most dominant center, etc. When it came to rebounding I was like, “Who is the best rebounder?” So I said, “You know what, I am going to do this. I am going to be the best rebounder there is. If anybody says anything about rebounding, my name has to be in the conversation. There is no confusion. There are no ifs, ands, or buts.” From that day forward, that was my mission: to be the best rebounder there is; and statistically, I am ranked that.





**From earning two All-Star appearances to being a four-time NBA rebounding leader, you have achieved an array of milestones throughout your career. What have these accolades meant to you?**

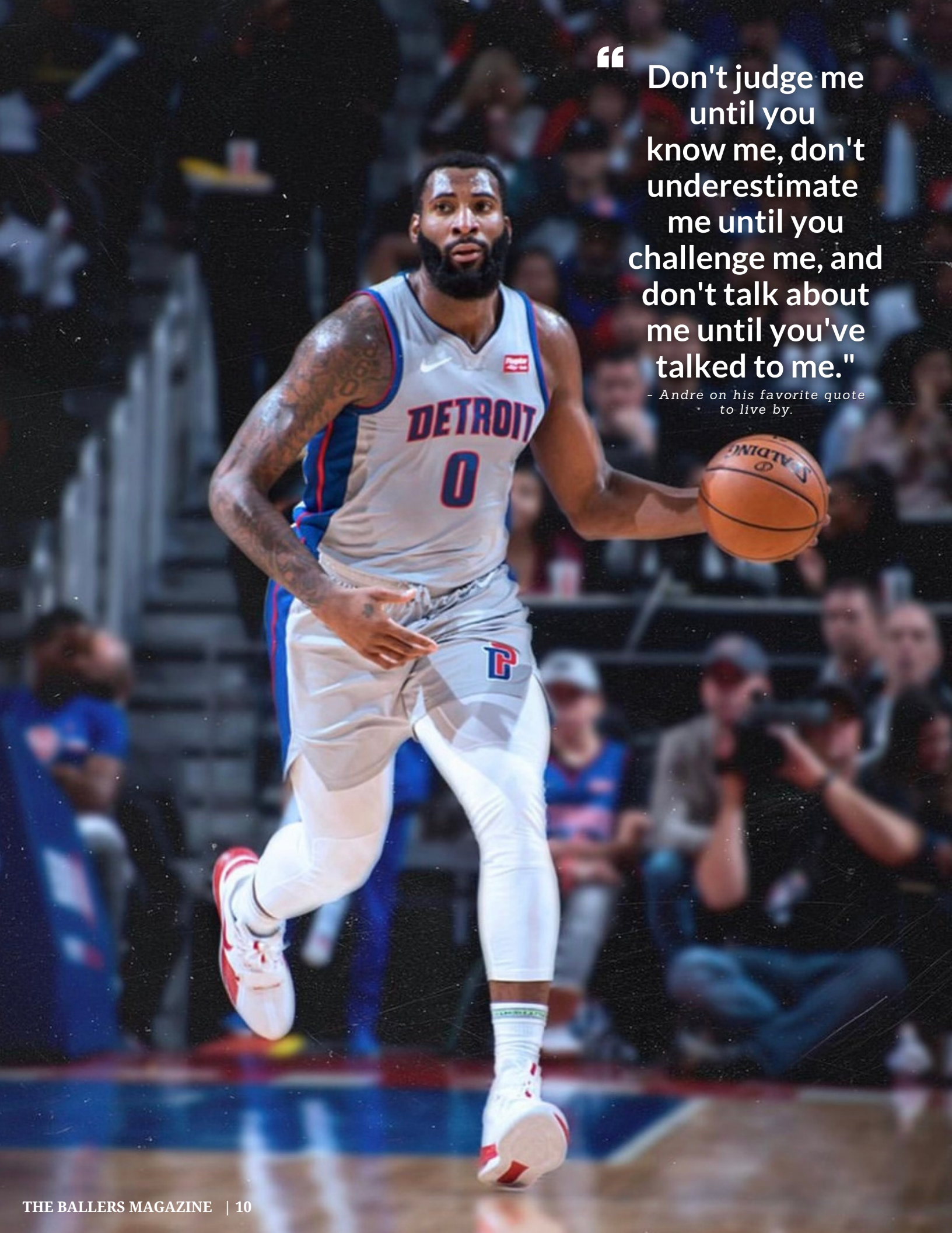
The individual accolades are always an amazing thing, and a great honor to have. You know for me, it just (represents) what I have worked for and the moments I have been striving for. To have it be noticed and on display is an incredible feeling for me. It is just crazy. For me now, with having those personal accolades, my next goal is to win a championship. I have done everything else individually for my career. It has been such a blessing for me to have gotten it done at such an early stage in my career, and still have so much time left to do so many more things. I am just excited for what's next.



**You just wrapped up your ninth season in the NBA. Throughout this journey, what are some things that you have learned about yourself?**

Just how mentally tough I am. You know, I have been through a lot in my career. I have done so many positive things in my career. I have had to deal with so many things throughout my career both personally and with basketball that I think my perseverance and my ability to adapt are things that I have (learned) about myself.



A full-page photograph of Andre Roberson, a professional basketball player, in action. He is wearing a white Detroit Pistons jersey with blue and red trim, featuring the word "DETROIT" and the number "0". He is dribbling a basketball with his right hand while running on a basketball court. The background is a blurred crowd of spectators in a stadium.

“ Don't judge me  
until you  
know me, don't  
underestimate  
me until you  
challenge me, and  
don't talk about  
me until you've  
talked to me.”

- Andre on his favorite quote  
to live by.



**Transitioning a little bit off the court, let's talk about some of your pursuits beyond the game! How have you started to build your personal brand off the court?**

My personal brand off the court has always been a fun thing for me too. Finding the time to think about my personal enjoyments outside of basketball was the biggest challenge throughout my career (though). You know, I was so focused on trying to make sure I established myself first with basketball before I focused on my personal enjoyments outside of basketball. I think I did a really good job of taking care of the basketball aspect before I started expanding into different things. I have been doing music since Lord knows how long. I taught myself how to DJ, I have been doing freestyles and stuff, and now I am in the production side of it—where I am actually releasing music that I record. I enjoy doing stuff with kids, so I have done things with Nickelodeon. I am a Global Ambassador for Special Olympics (as well). So for me, I think entertaining is something that I see myself doing for the rest of my life. When I am done playing basketball, I see myself doing something for Nickelodeon, being a host for a show, and just being involved in TV personally.

**That's awesome! Where does your passion for music come from?**

My passion for music comes from just experiences and being around music so much throughout my life. You know, my mom loves music. She used to play music around the house all the time, so I have always had a thing for music and an ear for music as well. For me, early in my career, I started off DJing first because I was afraid to let people know that I actually enjoyed putting out music. I started DJing to kind of give people that first sign of: "Hey! I like to be in the music world. I know how to DJ." But, that wasn't really a passion of mine—it was just something that I told myself I wanted to learn. It got to the point where I got really good at it, and was doing DJ gigs across the country and around the world. I did DJ gigs in Denmark, Toronto, LA, Turks and Caicos, China, (etc). I got to the point where I was like, "Alright, I am getting pretty big at this, but this is not my real passion." I started going to studios and started recording myself. I started finding different sounds, and different pockets of what I liked to sound like. I put out my first album in 2018, and I did a freestyle prior to that (as well) with this kid named Nate Nixen out in Detroit—which really got the buzz going about me doing music.







**Diving deeper into creating your "FYI" album, which as you mentioned released in 2018, could you share more with us about the creative process behind this work?**

Yeah! The reason I named it that was because not only do I play basketball, DJ, and do a million other things, but I also do music. That is where the name "FYI" came from. It was almost like, "For your information...I actually do this." The creative process behind the album (stemmed from) situations I have been in, things I have seen, things that I want, and things that inspire me.

**Recently, you also launched your own clothing brand—Farewell. Tell us a little bit more about the brand and what inspired you to embark on this venture.**

I thought of the name maybe about six, seven years ago. The word 'farewell' is obviously used often, but the reason why I enjoy that word so much is because it is never a "goodbye" and it is not like a "I don't want to see you again"—it is more of a "I will see you later and I wish you the best." The symbolization of a butterfly is similar to the word 'farewell'. You know, before there is a butterfly, it is in a cocoon. The cocoon grows, it gets bigger, and it expands to the point where it is too big for the cocoon. It comes out and becomes a beautiful butterfly. You look at that as like life. You know, you start off as a kid. You start growing and begin to become the mold of who you want to be—that is you in a cocoon. As you get to adulthood and start to live your life, you are a butterfly. You spread your wings and leave. You never forget your past or where you came from, but you look forward to your future and what comes with it. "Farewell" represents that, and the butterfly represents that as well too. 'Reincarnation' is what they use for the definition of a caterpillar becoming a butterfly. When you become a new you, and who you want to be, you accept it and enjoy it. You never want to write off your past—which is where the 'farewell' comes in—, you just wish it well. You have learned your lessons of what that life brought you, and you continue down a path of where you want to be next.



**Love that! What has this experience of designing your own clothing line been like for you?**

It has been such a fun experience for me! I have to thank a lot of my friends for really pushing me to do it. This was something that I had been talking about for years like I said earlier, and I have put so much energy into it. You know, Jessica has been incredible. She has definitely given me the confidence and boost to launch this. She is such an incredible woman to work with. I am so happy to have her on my team, and she has made all of this possible.

**Going into the advice side of things, what are some pieces of advice that you would give to someone who wants to play basketball at the professional level?**

I think for any young person starting out who wants to play professional basketball, there is no reason why you can't. You know when anyone tells me: "I dream of doing this..." or "I want to do this..." my question back to them is always, "Why can't you?" That is always my response. You don't have to wish, you can do it. If you really want to get it done, go get it. It is always there. Of course there are different variables in life that come into play, and sometimes it just doesn't happen, but the chances of you getting it done if you believe it (are there). It is all in you. I always tell kids, "There is nothing you can't do. If you work towards something and you love that process at the end of the day, it may not be that ultimate goal, but you will get some sort of success."

**On the business side of things, what are some pieces of advice that you would give to someone who is interested in embarking on their own business venture?**

I think just learning that business field is important. Just learning that business through and through, learning the highs and lows of it, learning the process, and understanding what goes on in that business field (is key). You also have to be content with what happens if all things don't go well. There is nothing wrong with being an entrepreneur and doing what your heart desires, you just have to be prepared to have a Plan B, C, and D. You can't just go into it blind, and be sold on only that one plan. You have to prepare yourself for what can happen, while still enjoying the process at the same time. There are a lot of failures when it comes to being an entrepreneur, so you have to be content with that and always have your next boat loaded.

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

Basketball changed life for myself, my family, and my children. It is crazy how many doors it has for life outside of basketball. You know, using this platform to be a leader to the next generation is the reason why I love this game so much. Everything I have been through, I can shed a light on and help the kids that are coming up learn from.





# BALLERS

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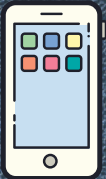
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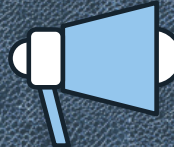
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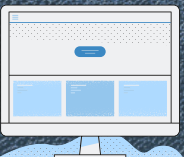
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# ANTHONY IRELAND

## *Professional Basketball Player | Founder of AI3 Leadership Academy*

Born and raised in Waterbury, Connecticut, Anthony Ireland discovered his passion for the game of basketball at a very young age. Growing up in this inner city, basketball often served as a positive outlet that elevated his mindset. It pushed him to think outside the box. It molded his identity. It showed him that with hard work and dedication, anything was possible. As he embarked on his basketball career at Crosby High School, Anthony continued to solidify his commitment to pursuing a professional career in the space. From scoring over 1,000 points to winning a state championship to earning a First Team All-State honor, he earned a series of accolades throughout his high school career. After graduating from Crosby High School and attending Winchendon School, Anthony decided to pursue his collegiate basketball career at Loyola University Marymount (LMU) in Los Angeles. A decision that challenged him to step outside his comfort zone, and tested his resilience to achieving his dreams of playing the game at the highest level. Throughout his four

years at LMU, Anthony not only started for the program, but also broke a lot of records—including scoring over 2,000 points, securing over 500 rebounds, and issuing over 500 assists. He was just getting started. As his collegiate career came to an end, Anthony began to explore his next move. Shortly after signing with an agency, Anthony signed his first professional contract to play for the Los Angeles Lakers in the 2014 NBA Summer League. This was the opportunity he had been waiting for, the first step in his professional career. After playing in the Summer League, Anthony decided to sign with a team in France and officially embarked on his career overseas. He hasn't looked back since. From France to Greece to Poland to Germany, Anthony has played in a variety of countries in Europe throughout the past seven years. Off the court, he has also been involved in a series of initiatives and philanthropic work through his AI3 Leadership Academy—an organization focused on giving back to his city of Waterbury. Through basketball camps, youth clinics, and leagues, Anthony has continued to work during his off-seasons to implement different programming for kids in his community. Incredible!

### **Let's talk about your journey early on! How was that transition from college into the world of professional basketball like for you?**

It was hard. It was hard, you know, because you go from being a college student—where you're not making any money and don't really have any responsibilities—to then the next following year being given this good amount of money. Now it's like, "Ok, what do you do? How are you gonna manage this? How are you gonna manage being in a business now?" So that was a very difficult transition for me in terms of the business aspect of life—taxes, knowing your contract, managing your money, saving your money, getting a financial advisor, (etc). Those were the things that I wasn't aware of, and kind of caught me off guard. It took me probably like two or three years to finally figure it out, and you know, I'm still figuring it out as I go. The business part of basketball was very tough. What I mean by that is: the pressure that's put on Americans to go over and perform in Europe. It's basketball at the end of the day, and we love what we do, but there are still politics that go along with the business. So wavering through all of that stuff and then still being able to perform on the court was hard for me at first. But then once I finally got the hang of it, it was all uphill from there. I can remember one particular time where I was gonna get sent home just because I wasn't performing to the ability that they thought I should be. At that point, I thought I was doing my job. You know, then I had to push to the next gear. After that season I realized, "Ok, as an American you're brought in to produce." For the most part, Americans are making the most money on the team so they're given the responsibility (to perform) as well. People don't understand how much that can affect you. You know, if you have a bad game, you can be on the next plane back home—that was a reality check for me and it was tough. Luckily I didn't get sent home, I finished out the year, weathered through that storm, and played well.



**Reflecting back on your time at Loyola Marymount, how do you think your journey there help prepare you for the next level?**

In two ways. Just being away from home at that young of an age—I was 18 years old—and being from Connecticut all the way out there in California (helped me). Of course you have help and guidance, but you still don't have your family and your loved ones around you. I think that definitely prepared me to then go overseas, be able to play, not get homesick, and be out of the States for nine to ten months out of the year. Then on the basketball court, it helped me out tremendously. For me, I was in a situation where the coach really liked me so I was able to showcase what I could do (on the court) during my entire career at school—for those four years. I kind of built a resume for myself during that time with the accolades that I accumulated on scoring, and (both) on the offense and defensive end. Those stats and those big games helped me get a good job and get that summer league contract. So not only did my time (at Loyola Marymount) help me to prepare myself for European basketball and being away from home, but it definitely prepared me in terms of building my resume so people could then know how good of a player I am and what I can do on the court.



**You mentioned that you recently got inducted into the Hall of Fame at Loyola Marymount. Tell us a little bit more about what that experience was like. What did achieving and earning this accolade mean to you?**

Yeah! I was caught off guard. I had no idea that it was gonna happen (\*laughs\*). I knew I had left my mark, but I didn't know if I could get the Hall of Fame (honor) or when. Once I got the phone call, I was completely humbled, completely taken aback. It was just a testament to, you know, the amount of hours and the work that I put in. I used to, it's sad to say now, but I used to skip class just to go to the gym. I would skip study hall just to be in the gym. I would be late to class or would come to class with ice on my ankles because I would be coming out of the gym. I just knew what I wanted to be doing after college, so I just put as much time in as I could. That paid off with me being selected into the Hall of Fame. It's awesome. It's something I can, you know, share with my kids and my family. I can take them on campus eventually and show them around. It was definitely a humbling experience. Now I get to be in the same breath as people such as Bo Kimble and Hank Gathers—they are (the) ones that initially put LMU on the map—and to be mentioned with them is amazing.





**Throughout your professional career, you have also played in a variety of countries—France, Greece, Portugal, Poland, etc. What are some key takeaways or lessons that you have learned during your time there that you could share with others who want to play abroad?**

First, you know, it's a business. So be smart with your money, invest your money, and protect your money. I think the best advice I've been given playing in Europe was to just never get too high, and never get too low. Whether you have a game where you have thirty points or you have a game where you have three points, you gotta go into it with the same mentality of staying present in the moment and not get too caught up in the future or on your last game.

**Transitioning a little bit off the court, let's talk about some of your ventures beyond the game! How have you started to build your personal brand off the court?**

I always wanted to give back to my community and be involved with my community. So I established the AI3 Leadership Academy, which is an organization in our city where we host camps for kids, give them an outlet, and provide somewhere for them to go throughout the summer. You know, (a place) where they can learn about the game and be around professional and collegiate athletes. Ultimately, we are just trying to change the culture not only with basketball—through the camps, kids (programs), and leagues—, but also with some after school and mentorship programs. I also have a podcast where I will interview professional and collegiate athletes—some that are still playing, some that are former pros—, and share their stories.

**That actually goes perfectly into our next question, which is all about your podcast. What were some of the inspirations behind creating “The Grind” podcast?**

I'm a person that likes to know about other people, their backgrounds, and their history—especially basketball players. For me, it just started off as something fun and something that I could do in my spare time. Also it's something that eventually, 20 years, 30 years down the line, I can have to share with the younger generations. That is the main thing for me—being able to share information that younger kids don't necessarily know, and help them by showing what we went through. The inspiration was that: letting the next generation know about (our journeys) and how to learn from our mistakes.



**Throughout this journey, both on and off the court, what are some things that you have learned about yourself?**

First, I would say I learned a lot about my history. The immediate history within my family, where we come from, and then just about history as a whole. Being outside of the United States, I have been able to have a unique perspective. I've definitely grown mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Just with being an athlete, you know, you actually have a lot of alone time and a lot of downtime. It kind of forces you to get out of your comfort zone. I have been able to look at the world differently, look at the United States differently, and then ultimately look at people differently—just because my perspective has shaped and shifted so many times through my travels.

**Going into the advice side of things, what are some pieces of advice that you would give to others who want to play basketball both at the collegiate and the professional level?**

Great question! I would just say, “You gotta be passionate and you gotta really love the game. There's people that love things about the game—you know, what comes with the game, the hype, or the recognition from your peers and your family—, but you have to really love the game to get the investment you want out of it. You have to work really hard, work diligently, and be detailed.” This doesn't happen overnight. This is something that's a long process. You have to have a marathon type of mindset to this craft because it takes a long time. There's a book called *Outliers* by Malcolm Gladwell, and he has this famous phrase where he thinks that it takes 10,000 hours to become a pro at something, anything. Whatever it is—writing, journaling, or any other career—, you have to put 10,000 hours in to become a pro. So I would just say, “Make sure you're passionate about it, and make sure you put in a lot of work because that's what it takes to get to the next level of whatever you want to do.”

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

Wow, another great question. I would just tell myself, “Try to prepare as much as you can. Ask questions, reach out to older guys, and reach out to pros and former pros. Ask them about their situations and how their careers went. Just try to soak up as much knowledge about this as you can because it's hard to prepare for everything that comes with (this). So just prepare more—know what questions you're gonna ask the agents, know (about) the business aspect of what comes with basketball, and know the politics of the game.” It's not just (about) putting the ball in the hoop anymore once you're getting paid or once you're on scholarship, so it's important to be prepared, ask questions, and use (your) resources.



*Photographs courtesy of Anthony Ireland (@aireland3)*







# JAVONTE SMART

## *2021 NBA Draft Prospect*

From baseball to football to basketball, Javonte Smart has been surrounded by the world of sports since a very young age. For this Baton Rouge, Louisiana native, his love for basketball emerged during his time in sixth grade. This was only the beginning. As he embarked on his high school career, Javonte was determined to elevate his skills on the court and leave his mark on the game along the way. He did just that. Throughout his time at Scotlandville Magnet High School, Javonte earned an array of accolades—including two gold medals with Team USA, a Gatorade Player of the Year Award, and several state titles—and continued to inch closer to his dreams of playing at the highest level. Upon graduation, Javonte began his collegiate career

*Photographs courtesy of Javonte Smart (@javontesmart)*

at Louisiana State University (LSU)—where he solidified his leadership skills both on and off the court, further strengthened his basketball IQ, and developed his game tremendously. After three seasons at LSU, Javonte made the decision to pursue his ultimate dream of playing in the NBA full force. Since then, he has declared for the 2021 NBA Draft, and has been preparing day after day to begin this new chapter in his career.

**Let's talk about your journey early on! You earned an array of accolades during your high school career—including the Gatorade Player of the Year Award and several state titles. What did earning these honors mean to you?**

At first, I looked at accolades as another thing or another step towards my dream goal. But nowadays, they play a bigger part in my life because a lot of younger people look up to me for those (accomplishments). Earning these honors was good for me because not too many people get a chance to even get selected or be in the conversation for those awards. It was very big for me to earn those out of high school.

**You also won several gold medals with Team USA. Could you share more with us about what that experience was like for you?**

Yeah! I won two gold medals with Team USA—my ninth grade year and I think my tenth grade year. Winning those two gold medals is a lifetime thing. You know, it is something you keep with you forever. Where I come from, not too many people even get a chance to do things like that. I was honored to be selected to play for the USA team, get to meet those guys, and learn (from) the great coaching staff. That is one of the things that I am most proud of.





**As you took that next step and embarked on your collegiate career at LSU, what were some challenges that you faced early on? How did you work to overcome them?**

I faced a lot of challenges. From sitting out a few games to this (past) year having COVID, I came across a lot of challenges and it was tough. But, I found a way to fight through it because of everything else that I had been through in my life. It made me stronger. I just kept working and stayed level-headed. By staying focused on what I really wanted to do and (who) I wanted to be in life, I think that really helped me to get through all of that adversity.

**You played at LSU for three years. Reflecting back on your time there, how do you think your game elevated?**

I think my game elevated tremendously. I added a lot to my game. I worked on my finishing a lot—that was one of the things that I wanted to focus on coming out of high school—and I improved my jumper. I think I am one of the best shooters in the country, and I put in work for that. Those three years helped me a lot for the future.

**Transitioning a little bit off the court, what are some things that you are passionate about beyond the game?**

Besides basketball, I also do some rapping. It is just a hobby right now. I really haven't taken it seriously, but it is just something I do outside of basketball to keep my mind going. One of my closest friends and I, we always used to work out and then just go to the studio. We would go there and make some songs. I think that is where I got (my passion) for music from.



**You are from Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Could you share more with us about the impact that your city has had on your journey?**

My city has had an amazing impact (on my journey). You know I always say, "Where I come from, not a lot of people make it out." I love to have the chance to put my city on my back and show people that where I come from, it's not easy, but we can do it. To the younger guys that I know, I always tell them (about) the importance of pushing through that adversity.

**Going into the advice side of things, what are some pieces of advice that you would give to someone who is interested in playing basketball at the collegiate level?**

I would tell them, "Playing basketball in college is hard, but if you put the work in, everything will pan out. All you have to do is keep working. Nothing comes easy in life, so why not put in the work (towards) getting better at something you love doing?"

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

I would say, "Never give up—even when stuff is not going your way. Time will tell. You just have to give it a chance, and when your chance comes, do whatever you can to accomplish what you want to accomplish."

**What's next! What are some personal goals that you have for the near future both on and off the court?**

Right now, I am working to get better every day, learn, get drafted, and become the man that I want to become. Off the court, I just want to show the people that are coming up from where I'm from that everybody can do it—all you have to do is put the work in. You know, just (show them) that it doesn't matter what anyone says—as long as you keep working, no matter what—you can make it happen.







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# NICK DEPAULA

***NBA Feature Writer & Host of “The Sneaker Game” | ESPN & Boardroom***



*Photographs courtesy of Nick DePaula (@nickdepaula)*

Born and raised in Sacramento, California, Nick DePaula has been surrounded by the world of sports for as long as he can remember. From street hockey to baseball to football to soccer, Nick played an array of sports growing up that fueled his interest in pursuing a career in the industry. None of which compared to the love he had for the game of basketball, it's culture, and it's impact beyond the court. Inspired by SLAM Magazine, it's rising influence during the 90s, and its convergence of basketball, hoop culture and sneakers, Nick decided to dive into the world of journalism during his collegiate career at the University of Oregon. Within his first year at Oregon, Nick officially began his journey covering the footwear industry after joining Sole Collector Magazine. It was only up from there! From becoming the publication's Editor-In-Chief and Creative Director to leading several collaborative footwear projects for the brand, Nick helped grow the brand tremendously over the next seven years.

He didn't just stop there. After his time at Sole Collector, Nick worked with Nice Kicks as the brand's Creative Director, and helped expand the digital platform further. Since then, Nick has joined ESPN as a NBA feature writer—covering the footwear industry surrounding the league—and is also the host of Boardroom's newest show, “The Sneaker Game.” Truly remarkable!

**During your time at the University of Oregon, you earned a degree in journalism with minors in business and communications. How was that transition from college into the world of sports journalism like for you?**

Yeah! So I figured, you know, if I wanted to be in the magazine world and in the journalism field I obviously had to have the knowledge and background in terms of education. I definitely looked at Oregon as a school that was going to help me in that regard. But also, I was really excited to go there because of the proximity to Portland. For me, it was about learning journalism while also possibly having access to people up in Portland—that was a big key for me. I was a big email gunslinger, as I like to call it. I was emailing people at Nike, Adidas, and just all the brands there to try and grab lunch with them, pick their brains, and just start to network while I was still in school. I was probably 20 years old doing that. Then I started to product test for both Nike and AND1, and just learned more about the process of designing and developing shoes. That really was a great foundational piece for me. So I tried to utilize my time in Eugene in a lot of ways—not just in school, but also trying to reach out and make connections while (I was) there.



**Definitely! As you took that next step and embarked on your professional career, what were some challenges that you faced early on? How did you work to overcome them?**

I was a junior (in college) when I pitched my first story that got published in Sole Collector. The thing with that field is that you have to come up with all of the ideas for the stories. Some stuff is easier to think of, you know if there is a new LeBron (shoe) launching or a new anniversary, but I think the biggest challenge sometimes was coming up with (those) story ideas. We would have six issues a year—with the magazine running in print and being available at Foot Locker. We were also doing a blog that had daily content and a monthly print issue that we were doing in China at one point. So just trying to come up with all of those ideas for stories was difficult. I think also managing people and managing writers, while starting to build out a team that could make content for all of those different platforms was a challenge early (on). I was 23-24 years old trying to figure all of that out at the same time—it was an early start in the industry but a fun road too.

**Throughout your journey at Sole Collector, you also became the Editor-in-Chief and Creative Director of the company. Could you share more with us about your journey and experiences there?**

Yeah! That was probably the biggest thing too. You know, yes we were a magazine, but we were always trying to reach people in different ways. While at Sole Collector, a big thing we did was a lot of different in-person events. With those events, I was able to work with our team to design and create different (spaces) and collaboration sneakers as well. We did, I think, about 20 collaboration sneakers that launched in different cities all over the country. That was a super exciting piece because we were able to either pick models that we all really loved—like the Penny Hardaway line—and tell a different story in a new way within a pack, or take models that people maybe weren't familiar with and retell stories. It was more about how we could bring (content) to life in many different ways—instead of just another six-page interview. Whether it was video platforms, collaborations, or in-person events, we really tried to challenge ourselves with developing things that could really connect to the sneaker community and become something that people from across the country and around the world wanted to travel into and meet. I think that was probably the most exciting part—just (witnessing) how people from all of these different places could meet at this one (spot), and realize that they all had a passion for the same thing.



*Photo credit (above): Ally Pintucci*







**Let's talk about branding! How did you get started building your personal brand in the space—both in the sportswear and journalism industries?**

I was doing a talk with a school and I almost was saying how part of journalism nowadays is almost more so story marketing. You have to really frame and shape the story you're trying to put out there to get people to notice it, to want to click it, and hopefully read it as well—that's a big piece now. Back in the day with *Sole Collector*, we had people that were getting the magazine monthly. (They) were subscribers, and were just getting it in person and reading it. Now, you're trying to break through on Twitter and get people to notice your link and click it from there—they're not necessarily going directly to the website. I think that's a huge shift that I would encourage any writer to look into. You know, the business side of things. When I was in college I wanted to get a minor in business and marketing because I think a lot of journalism now is, yes, writing a great story, but also about (getting) to actually see it and find it. That was a huge component. I also think the big thing I always try to consider is not thinking of myself as a personal brand. There was a journalism teacher I had that had a really big quote about how there are some people that read the news, some people that write the news, and some people that are the news. I think as a writer, it's very important to kind of realize which one you are and stay with that. I think the key to what people like about what I do is that it's about the person I'm writing about, not so much about me. It's about the subject and the content. So I always try to keep that at the forefront, and think of it less as a personal brand element, and more about highlighting the things that I'm writing about.

**In addition to the people that you meet along the way, what are some things that keep you inspired and motivated to continue creating new content to share with others?**

Yeah, I think that's a fun question! You know, in sneakers, every year there's new releases. Every season, there's new launches. I always like to say that sneakers are a great portal to people's personalities. A lot of players use that canvas to express things that they believe in—whether that's stories about their hometown and where they're from, their journeys, people close to them and their family, or different social justice causes. We're seeing guys reassign royalty money into such great causes as well—whether it's internships or different give back programs. So sneakers, endorsement deals, (and) partnerships have become, you know, (an opportunity) to share a look into somebody's personality and the things around them that they really feel strongly about.



**Going into the advice side of things, what are some pieces of advice that you would give to someone who is interested in embarking on a similar career path and going into sports journalism and the world of sneaker culture?**

Yeah! I think the biggest thing is you literally just have to write as much as possible, and start to really refine yourself before you start to pitch out at different places. I think the biggest thing for me was always taking every small step along the way to try to get to where I was going to be, and realizing it's a long process at times. When I was growing up—and it's still around —, there was a message board called NikeTalk. That's the first place I wrote. It was just a message board about what people liked about sneakers. I often wrote all of these different case studies. I would have like the state of AND1 and I would break down who their players were, what their technologies were, and what their models were. It became like a place where everybody would chime in and give feedback. I think nowadays with platforms like Medium, and different places where you can self-publish in a sense, anybody that's in college and starting out can turn (there) to write. I think the other biggest thing is that the sports journalism world has transformed so much as well. Writing is not the end-all be-all. Whether it's podcasts, videos, or things where you can be on camera and give your personality a little more, I think those kinds of opportunities for today's generation are great as well. Just try to take advantage of all the resources out there on the Internet. I think the other piece (of advice) is to try to have a unique perspective on things. You know, that was always my biggest thing. Reporting on sneaker deals and contracts was something that people couldn't really get elsewhere, and to me that was a good angle to try to carve out because it was so unique in this space. So try to find an angle that can really become yours, and something that people come to you for. I think that's super important.

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

Basketball is everything. I think the creativity of the game is unlike any other sport, and then I think the personalities of the players around it and just the culture of the sport is incredible. You know, there's no other sport that has the connectivity to fashion, to style, to music, and to the off court expressions that you're seeing so many players embrace. I mean that's always been there, but now with social media, there's just so many different ways of everybody's personalities getting celebrated. I think that to me is the most exciting thing. There's a Jay-Z line that goes, "I walk like a ballplayer." There's just like a stance and presence that I think every basketball player has, and that part of it to me is what drives the sport and what makes it so exciting. You see that with the NBA, you see that with the WNBA. Just every player that plays the game. There's just a natural confidence you have to have to excel at it, and that carries into all windows of your life. For me to be able to still be involved in the culture of that has been so exciting because that's always been such a key piece of it for me.



**Definitely! You also touched on the importance of relationships and how that was something that helped you in your journey, especially early on during your time in college. Could you share your thoughts with us on the importance of having that group of people to learn from and connect with along the way?**

Yeah! I think that was a huge piece. I was trying to make connections at Nike and at other brands to make those inroads early (on). I think the other thing is that, you know, when you're networking and trying to meet people and hear about their backstory, it shouldn't always be a one-way street. You should be there as well to provide them some insight and some feedback on things that you're seeing. I think that was the biggest thing I tried to bring—I was always trying to share with them some insight about the industry from my perspective and from a young person's perspective as well. When you are networking and meeting with people, try to be mindful of their time and know that they have a lot of things going on. You want to be bringing them some value as well in that conversation, and not just coming at it from the angle of trying to get a job or something like that.





# ASHLEY NICOLE MOSS

***Sports TV/Radio Host |  
Sports Illustrated, SNY, Knicks  
Fan TV & iHeartRadio***

For Ashley Nicole Moss, the opportunity to merge her passions for sports and creative storytelling was something she discovered during her time at Florida Atlantic University (FAU). After interning with SFL-TV as an entertainment correspondent and working for the university's newspaper as a sports writer, Ashley began to tap into an array of multimedia platforms that pushed the envelope in both journalism and visual media. This was only the beginning. From working as a sideline reporter for NBC 6 upon graduation to joining iHeartRadio as an entertainment correspondent to curating her own YouTube sports series—"All In With Ashley Nicole"—, Ashley has continued to tap into different

*Photographs courtesy of Ashley Nicole Moss (@ashnicolemos)*

avenues that highlight the stories of athletes and entertainers in the industry. Currently, she has her own show with Sports Illustrated, is a NBA reporter and host for KnicksFanTV, and can also be heard weekdays on iHeart Sports Radio. Truly amazing!

## **Let's start with your journey early on! How was that transition from college into the world of sports journalism and media like for you?**

I think in college, like most college students, you think you have it all figured out. You think that when you leave college, you're gonna have this great job. If you would've asked me where I would be after college, I would've told you ESPN. As college students, you are kind of sold this dream, right? You're sold this dream that if you do well in school, which I did—I graduated with a 3.8 GPA—, do all the right things, graduate school, and go through all the motions, then the world is just gonna open up for you. You know, the world is your oyster. That's not really how it works (though). You have to pay your dues. So I would say the transition from college into the real world was just a lot of grinding, you know? It's a whole lot of grinding. It was a whole lot of self-discovery. It was a whole lot of failure. In the beginning, it was really about just throwing stuff at the wall and seeing what stuck.



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

I think it (happened) once I was in a space where I really started to get more consistent with working on what I wanted to do. I think that building your brand just comes naturally. I think when I started taking social media more seriously, and looking at it as a digital resume—instead of looking at it as a way to promote what I was doing, what I was eating, or where I was going—I started to showcase my work. It was like, “Oh, I can use this to showcase my work. If I showcase my work, that will attract people who are interested in that field or work in that field. Maybe then, I can go ahead and build a brand that is me and that's different.” I think once I started working at iHeart (as well), that was when I really started formulating my brand. I really started taking it seriously, and that's kind of the model and mold that I've been using ever since.

**From working with Sports Illustrated to iHeartRadio to SNY to Knicks Fans TV, you have worked with an array of organizations throughout this journey. Could you share more with us about what that experience has been like for you of tapping into different areas within the sports industry?**

I think a lot of the time, you are kind of discouraged from doing so many different things, right? People kind of tell you that you can only be in one thing—you should only focus on one thing. I think I learned early on the opposite. I learned early on that the benefit of doing a bunch of different things is the exposure. You know, you tap into a bunch of different audiences. You tap into a bunch of different fan bases that maybe you wouldn't have gotten if you were just focused on one thing. So for me, it's a lot of juggling (\*laughs\*). It can get a little bit overwhelming at times, but what I've noticed is that it expands my reach in ways that I don't think it would have done if I had not tapped into so many different things. With Knicks Fans TV, that's the Knicks fan base. With SNY, that's the tri-state area fan base. With Sports Illustrated, that's a more national fan base. So you're catching so many different markets that you wouldn't even be able to touch if you only were focused on one of them—that's kind of my mindset when doing so many different things at once.



**"Super Bowl weekend in Miami. It was the first time I got to cover a Super Bowl, and I remember dreaming of working a Super Bowl. When I found out the Super Bowl was coming to the 305, I remember saying to myself: “I have to work a Super Bowl. I have to work this Super Bowl. Like it's in my backyard, there's no way I'm not gonna be there.” Lo and behold, working with iHeart, I got there."**

*- Ashley on one of her favorite memories in the industry thus far.*





## **What are some of your sources of motivation and inspiration to continue growing and evolving throughout this journey?**

My parents are my support system, for real—my mom especially. There's been so many times I'm just like, "I don't know if this is for me. I don't know if I'm gonna make it. I don't know if anyone cares about what I'm doing. Why does nobody watch my videos? Why am I not getting the opportunities or jobs that some of my peers are getting?" She just always reminds me that, you know, your journey is kind of already pre-set. It's you doing the work to get there. Whether you are a spiritual person or a religious person, I'm a firm believer that everyone has a destiny. Everyone has a path in this life, and it's already kind of predetermined. What we're doing is just following the steps and going through the motions to get there. She reminds me of that, and I think that's important to have. I think also for me, when you see the work—like when you go through all the craziness and you see your products or a project that you've worked on—, that end result (brings) like an adrenaline rush. You're like, "Ok, this is crazy. This is overwhelming. There were tears shed, nights (where) I had no sleep, and times (when) I was hungry, but I want more. I need more." I think that ambition is also something that pushes me. Not only do I love what I do, but I also love the result. I love thinking of more. You know like, "What's the next thing we can do? What's the next project? What's the next interview?" That keeps me going.

## **Love that! Now going into the advice side of things, what are some pieces of advice that you would give to someone who is interested in pursuing a career path and going into the world of sports journalism and media?**

Keep going. There are going to be so many times (when) you want to quit. There are going to be so many times that you're like, "Is this for me? Is this even worth it?" There are going to be so many times where you are just questioning everything and everyone. You gotta keep going because you are just that one extra push away from that being the thing that takes you over the edge. I think that people sometimes get so focused on what's not happening, that they forget to realize and appreciate what has happened. That's just human nature, you know. As humans, we always want more. As people, we are flawed and we are always thinking about: "I need more, I want more. I have to have more." With that, you lose sight easily of what you have done, what you have accomplished, and what you do have in life. I can't tell you how many people I know who have had these same talks with me—when I was this close to giving up, and then the next thing you know, that big break happens and everything changes.



**In terms of skills and characteristics, what are some qualities that you think can help someone excel in the industry?**

I think that you have to be a good communicator, especially if you want to be on camera—that's a big part of the job. I think you also need to be personable because that's a good way to disarm your subjects. When you're interviewing people, the more personable you are, the more comfortable your subject is. I think that you need to be creative. You know, tap into your creative side—everybody has a creative side. Sometimes it's tapped into and other times it's not tapped into. I think you'd be surprised if you really give it a little bit of TLC and a little bit of attention. Everyone is different in that aspect, so just find what your niche is. Are you a great writer? Do you have a vision for video production? Do you have a vision for lighting? Do you have a vision for interviewing? I mean, everyone has a creative aspect. You just, in this field, have to figure out what it is—that's a difference maker.

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

Oh so many things (\*laughs\*). I would say, "Don't change. Just evolve, get better, but don't lose sight of you." I think so many times, you know women especially, we feel we have to be a certain way in order to be successful. I think especially in sports, you kind of get that. You feel like you can't be too pretty or no one's gonna take you seriously. But, you have to be somewhat attractive otherwise nobody is going to want to look at you. Just so many different things. You know, you can't be too dominant because then you are the mad lady. You can't be too submissive because then no one is going to respect you. I mean, there's so many different things that I feel as women we're kind of pressured into thinking we have to be. We have to walk this really weird fine line in order to have any type of success in whatever field it is—I don't feel that it just applies to the media (industry). So I would tell my younger self, "Just be you. Don't be complacent in being the same—I mean grow and get better as a person—, but definitely don't feel you have to be anything different than who you are to be successful. What makes you different makes you unique, and what makes you unique makes you desirable to the right team, to the right company, and to the right project. That's your superpower. Nobody can be you." I think that is really important for everyone to remember, and that's something that I wish I would have remembered in times where I didn't.



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

Wow, great question! Basketball is something my dad and I have always done together, something we have watched together. It's a bonding moment for me and my dad. So (the game) reminds me of our time together. He is the one who taught me the game, you know. He's the one who made me fall in love with the game. It reminds me of him.





THE BALLERS MAGAZINE PRESENTS

# THE UP NXT SERIES

A new segment dedicated to shining light on up-and-coming sports professionals! These feature stories provide an exclusive look into the journeys of athletes, creatives, and rising business professionals in high school and college!





UP NXT SERIES

# TALIA HARRIS

Talia Harris started playing basketball at just the age of six years old. Growing up in Indiana, Talia remembers watching her older sister—WNBA star Tyasha Harris—play the sport, and quickly becoming interested in embarking on a career of her own. It wasn't until her time

*Photographs courtesy of Talia Harris (@smooovie25)*

in elementary school though that she truly discovered her love for the game. She hasn't looked back since! Recently, Talia completed her first year at Fishers High School and is currently wrapping up another great season with Lady Team Teague. As she continues her basketball journey, Talia is looking forward to strengthening her skills on the court, becoming an Indiana All Star, and above all, helping those around her reach their highest potential.





**Let's talk about your journey thus far! Could you share more with us about your first year playing high school basketball?**

I am going to be a sophomore next year—so I have only been in high school for a year, but so far it has been pretty good. (In terms of) the game, I wouldn't say it is a lot faster. I have always played up or played against my sister, so I am kind of used to playing at that (pace). It is normal to me.

**Now that you have made that transition from middle school to high school, what are some challenges that you have faced throughout your first year? How did you work to overcome them?**

Probably the strength (aspect). Since I just started lifting, and it has only been a year in high school, other players were stronger and a little bit quicker than me. But throughout this (past) year, I have started getting stronger and faster.

**You've also played in several matchups with Lady Team Teague—your AAU team. How do you think your game has elevated throughout these tournaments?**

Everyone on my team is a year older than me, so we have to play to their grade. I am playing up and it has helped me get my game better. It has helped me see the floor better, get stronger, and push myself to be better (on the court).





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

I would say: 1) Leader, 2) Funny, 3) Trustworthy. I would choose those three words because I am not just a leader in basketball, I can also help people out in school. A lot of my friends trust me (as well as) my teammates and coaches—they will let me take a big shot in the game. I also think I am a really funny person. I am goofy all the time.

**Reflecting back on your journey thus far, what are some things that you have learned about yourself?**

I have learned that I will not give up easily. I will always push, no matter what. Even if we are down by 10, 15, or 20 points, I will always push.

**Going into the advice side of things, what are some pieces of advice that you would give to other young athletes who are interested in playing basketball?**

I would say, "Always go hard as (if) it were your last time on the court. Never give up on your dreams. It might not show right now that you are getting somewhere, but it will pay off later."

**What's next! What are some personal goals that you have for the near future both on and off the court?**

On the court, I want to at least win one state championship and be an Indiana All-Star. Off the court, I just want to be a good student in class, help my parents out whenever they need it, and be a good sister.





# BRINGING YOUR VISION TO LIFE

## DREAMS → REALITY

**WRITE YOUR  
GOALS DOWN.  
CREATE A PLAN.  
TAKE ACTION.**

ABOVE ALL, CELEBRATE  
THE SMALL WINS AND  
EMBRACE THE JOURNEY.

"A goal without a plan  
is just a wish."

ANTOINE DE SAINT-EXUPÉRY

"If you can believe it,  
you can see it."

LES BROWN

**DAILY  
AFFIRMATIONS**

**DAILY  
GOALS**





# BALLERS

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T H E M A G A Z I N E

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



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