

Behind the Athlete: Former Terp in business to Take Charge

By Tim Sparks

The name Jerrod Mustaf is synonymous with Maryland basketball. From his days as a three-time Parade All-American under legendary coach Morgan Wooten, to his two-year career at the University of Maryland, the former New York Knick and Phoenix Sun garnered a reputation as a skilled forward whose talent was enough to turn the lanky DeMatha product into a college star and first-round NBA draft pick.

His playing days now behind him, Mustaf is making use of a different type of skill in the business world - people skills, which come in handy when you are the founder, president and CEO of Street Basketball Association, vice president of the Take Charge of Your Life Juvenile Diversion Program, sports ambassador to the Republic of Gambia and serve in various other capacities both locally and globally.

The Take Charge program was founded in 1990 by Mustaf's father, Shaar, when the younger Mustaf was a rookie in New York. The foundation's programs include youth diversion, vehicle theft prevention, basketball and life skills, families in need of counseling, parenting enhancement, and academic monitoring and truancy prevention. According to Mustaf, the program's unofficial motto can most aptly be summed up in a simple saying: It's not where you start, but where you finish.

When Mustaf got his first pay check from the NBA, he was anxious to help his father get the foundation up and running. "The year I was drafted ... I was able to financially support it," said Mustaf, the father of two sons, ages 7 and 13. "And I definitely wanted to come back to it (after my playing career ended). It was always something I wanted to do. When you're playing basketball you don't have a chance to interact in an office setting, so I had to start from scratch. I did an internship a couple of years with the NBA, and I was interested in management. It was the best of both worlds to be able to combine my passions."

While Take Charge was born at the beginning of Mustaf's professional playing career, inspiration for the Street Basketball Association came at the end of it. Following his four seasons in the NBA, Mustaf won two championships while playing overseas, where he met young stars Pau Gasol (current Los Angeles Laker all-star) and Juan Carlos Navarro - who both played on a junior team in Spain. Mustaf then signed to play with a team in Izmir, Turkey, but his career ended when the team folded three weeks after his arrival.

"I was with Litterial Green (the all-time leading scorer in the history of the University of Georgia), and as we were leaving (Izmir) we saw all these people playing basketball on the beach," Mustaf said. "On the flight home I got out my notebook and started writing. I wanted SBA to be based off a model of the NBA."

The SBA features the best street basketball players from 13 cities across the country, including Washington, D.C., and Baltimore, and Mustaf considers each squad akin to a "mini NBA team." Though Mustaf says the association has not yet reached its full potential, it's well on its way, with basketball clinics, player appearances, and global basketball development key components of the league.

The global basketball development Mustaf speaks of is intertwined with his role as sports ambassador to Gambia. While Mustaf has helped the SBA attract fans here in the United States - by finding talented street ball players and incorporating entertainment during competitions - he has also aided in making street ball a popular pastime in Africa. But his influence in Africa is not limited to basketball.

"Through SBA, I started doing the African Development Program (which uses clinics to keep African players, coaches, officials and media up to date on the latest developments in American street ball) ... but there have been other things as well. I saw hopelessness in a lot of the youth in Africa. They don't think they have many options."

Thanks to Mustaf and many others, hopeless youth now have options. But Mustaf's outreach to Africa extends far beyond any basketball court. He is also president of the African Tourism Organization, which is an anti-human trafficking campaign.

Mustaf has spent years sharing his gifts and abilities with others, but there are several former teammates of his who have made a difference in his life. Former Knicks teammate Charles Oakley, and former Suns teammates Mark West, Charles Barkley and Danny Ainge, are NBA colleagues Mustaf has looked up to most over the years.

These days, Mustaf's three sons look up to him. Of the various activities that keep Mustaf busy each day, none brings him more enjoyment than being with his children. One of his hobbies is coaching 7-year-olds, including his younger son, in the Bowie Boys and Girls Club on Thursday nights.

"I love being with (my sons)," Mustaf said. "My down time is their time. Being a good father is by far the most important thing to me."

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