

BALLERS

SPORTS + BUSINESS + MOTIVATION

JUNE ISSUE

BREE
GREEN
NEW
BEGINNINGS

*BRIA
JANELLE*

*TICARA
DEVONE*

*JESSICA
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Editor's Note

The Ballers Magazine is a digital magazine dedicated to shining light on amazing people in sports that are inspiring the next generation.

Through a series of in-depth, exclusive interviews, this magazine will bring you along the journey to success of the industry's most incredible athletes and business professionals. From sports to business to motivation, we are committed to sharing stories that encourage you to seek greatness. Whether you are a sports enthusiast or are looking to enter the sports industry, we are excited to provide this platform for you to connect with these sports all-stars.

Connect with us at
@TheBallersMagazine on
Instagram or send us an email,
and let us know who you would
like to see featured on our
forthcoming issues.

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

Sofi Dumont

SOFI DUMONT

Editor-in-Chief | @sofidumont





BREE GREEN

NEW BEGINNINGS.

Born and raised in Lexington, Kentucky, Briana (Bree) Green has been passionate about the game of basketball since a very young age. After falling in love with the game at just six years old, Bree began dreaming about one day playing basketball at the professional level. **Little did she know that her dreams would become a reality in just a few years.** Her close relationship with her older brother was something that shaped her game tremendously. From playing with him one-on-one to competing against his friends, Bree continued to strengthen her skills on the court day after day. Fast-forward a few years, and she was graduating as a back-to-back state champion from Lexington Catholic High School and planning to continue her basketball career at The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP). **But suddenly, everything changed.** Bree suffered back-to-back ACL injuries her freshman and junior year, and felt unsure about her future in basketball. **She wasn't ready to give up just yet though. If she was going to retire from the game, she wanted to go out on her own terms.** So she worked, worked, and worked some more. After returning to the court her senior year, Bree played her last season at UTEP, successfully completed her collegiate career there, and received the opportunity to play overseas. **The rest is history!** Bree then played professional basketball in the Czech Republic, Spain, and Mexico, and returned to the states to play for the Harlem Globetrotters. After four years with the organization, Bree was ready to take the next step in her career. Currently, she is living in Los Angeles and working on building her personal brand off-the-court. From training to brand partnerships to content creation, Bree is committed to building her legacy beyond the game of basketball.



After you completed your college career, you were determined to take the next step and play overseas. How was that transition process like?

I knew that once I got my knees right, I had the skill level to play (at the next level). I just needed that opportunity. It was really hard because my senior year (of college) I didn't really have the stats or the film to show what I could do. I knew that I just needed that one chance though. Once I got the opportunity in the Czech Republic, I was like, "Oh yeah I'm not letting this opportunity go and get away from me. This is all I need." Honestly, playing in the Czech Republic was tough, the physicality and their style of play is different over there so it was something I definitely had to get used to and acclimated with. Once I got the opportunity to play in Spain though, I was way more comfortable because I had a year of pro-experience under my belt. I just felt more and more confident, more and more life myself. By the time I got to Mexico, I just felt like James Harden. I felt like nobody could stop me when I was on the court. My right knee did start hurting again when I was in Mexico, and it was difficult because we were playing back-to-back (games) every Saturday and Sunday. It started to take a toll on my body because I had to be the best player, guard the best player, and play for 40 minutes (every game). My team and I did really good though, and that experience was awesome.

Take us through that time early on in your basketball career where you suffered knee injuries back to back. What kept you grounded throughout this process and how did you overcome this adversity at such a young age?

I had never been injured before my freshman year. So (going into) my freshman year, I was doing great. I was confident. Once it happened, I was like "Man! I am about to be out for like six to eight months." It was tough. I mean, anybody who has gone through it will tell you, knee surgeries are tough. I knew that I wanted to overcome it (though), and I knew that to do so I had to be resilient, stay the course, and believe that I would be back. So my sophomore year I was coming back, but I knew mentally I still wasn't ready. Even physically, I knew I wasn't ready to come back. Fast-forward to my junior year, I still wasn't 100% with my right ACL so I knew I was overcompensating when I was playing. Once (the injury happened again and) I tore my left ACL, I knew it immediately because I felt that pain before. As soon as it happened, I was just like "Wow. I have to do this again. I have to go through all of this again." The first time I got injured, I was more positive because it was new and I didn't know it was going to be that tough (to recover). The second time though, I had been through it already and I knew it was going to be difficult. I was frustrated. I was sad. I was depressed. I was like, "I'm just going to quit basketball." That is just not who I am though, so I knew I had to overcome it. My senior year was still not how I wanted it to be because now both of my knees weren't 100%, and most importantly, mentally I was just not there. I knew my capabilities on the court and I knew I wasn't there. Despite all of these (adversities), I didn't want that to be the reason why I quit basketball. So I worked, worked, worked, worked and worked to get back to getting my knees stronger and my mind in the right place.





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(Basketball) has allowed me to travel the world, see new things, and meet new people. It has taken me to places I never thought I would go."

- Bree on the impact basketball has had in her life and reasons why the sport is so special to her

Photographs courtesy of Bree Green (@brianagreen11)

You also played for the Harlem Globetrotters here in the states. Could you share more about your experience of getting to travel and connect with the youth during your time with this organization?

The Globetrotters was an amazing opportunity. Number one, I always wanted to travel—that was just something I always wanted to do. I also just wanted to play basketball, so being with the Globetrotters never felt like a job. I was going from city to city, doing what I love and what I was passionate about. It allowed me to have a bigger platform and (connect) with people. They would look up to me and expect me to be a good role model and influence, and I accepted that as best as I could. You know, I'm not perfect, but I tried to be a good representation of women and female athletes throughout my time there, and just highlight that girl power.

Basketball has played a huge role in your life. What does basketball mean to you? Why is it so special?

I fell in love with basketball when I was so young. I just feel like basketball, even now, just gives me an outlet. If I'm having a bad day, for instance, it gives me an outlet where I can go outside and dribble or go outside and put up shots (and clear my mind). It has allowed me to travel the world, see new things, and meet new people. It has taken me to places I never thought I would go. I'm definitely grateful for it. It is something I have always loved and have never taken for granted. Even though I played other sports growing up, basketball was always my focal point, my main sport. For example, if I was running track, I was running track just so I could get quicker for basketball. It has been something I grew up loving, have watched, and studied. Kobe Bryant was my favorite player and Allen Iverson was a close second growing up, so I would watch those guys and study their moves. I used to watch those "and-one" mixtapes and "hot sauce" skits—just seeing the way that Allen Iverson handled himself and Kobe Bryant (implemented) his mentality inspired me. Different people have inspired me throughout this journey, and now I try to inspire people as well.

“

I would just tell them: “Don’t think too much.” Do what you like to do, do what makes you happy, and your audience will come. They will find you organically.”

- Bree on a piece of advice she would give to someone interested in pursuing a similar career path



Diving more into your personal brand, you shared that you are working on developing your brand off-the-court through hosting, creating, training, etc. How have you worked to build your personal brand throughout this journey?

Social media is a great platform to grow and get yourself out there. I was so late to it to be honest. I didn’t even create an Instagram until later on in my career. Once I joined the Globetrotters, it gave me a bigger platform. At the same time (though), I didn’t want people to just know me as “Hoops,” the Globetrotter—which is why I made sure my Instagram focused on Bree rather than my nickname as a Globetrotter. I wanted my platforms to be about me, my basketball journey, my personality, etc. I really wanted to be transparent, authentic, real, and just a (testament) to who Bree was. From there, I have just continued to grow (my social media) doing it my way, or the way that I think is the right way, and just having fun with it.

Throughout this journey, what have been some challenges that you have faced building your personal brand? How have you overcome them?

I would say the biggest challenge is just creating content. There might be times when I don’t feel as motivated or I don’t feel like putting myself out there. It’s just about staying consistent, staying the course, and knowing when you need a break. For example, I’m perfectly fine going off social media for a couple of days and decompressing. I think it’s perfectly fine and healthy. There is life beyond social media. I want to be dope in the real world too.

What’s up next? What are some goals that you have for the near future?

Goals for me...I’m just trying to continue to grow as a person, an athlete, an influencer, just as anything that I do. I plan on growing my YouTube once I get to LA as well and am trying to get my hands on a couple of things. I want to train, I want to work more deals, I want to get more into art. For example, I love painting and am actually working on a series now where I’m combining my favorite cartoons with (my love for) basketball. I’m just (exploring things and) not limiting myself to just one thing.



JAMIL ABIAD

Professional Trainer & Entrepreneur
CEO | NL Fitness | Next Level Media

For Jamil Abiad, the game of basketball has been a prominent part of his life since the age of 12. From playing the game in high school to pursuing a collegiate career at Bishop's University, Jamil was always determined to make his dreams of playing professional basketball a reality. **Through hard work and dedication, he did just that.** After graduating from his university, Jamil embarked on a successful basketball career in Lebanon. Throughout his time overseas, he continued to strengthen his love for the sport, while thinking about ways to give back to the game. **He was determined to leave a legacy that extended well beyond the court.** Four years after playing in Lebanon, Jamil returned to Ottawa, Canada and started his fitness company, NL Fitness. While growing this business—which focused on basketball training and player development—he also continued to heighten the success of his media company, Next Level Media. **His passion for entrepreneurship did not stop there.** He also founded his own competitive boys basketball team in Ottawa, called Team Believe, and has been able to provide incredible opportunities to young athletes that dream of playing basketball at the collegiate or professional level. From personal development on the court to community involvement opportunities off the court, Jamil continues to create platforms that provide the next generation with the tools to reach their goals.

Photographs courtesy of Jamil Abiad (@jamil.abiad)

You mentioned that the biggest challenge with embarking on this entrepreneurial journey was getting started. When did you start your first business? What was that journey like for you?

The first business I started was actually my media company back in 2016. That was a year after I graduated from my university. The sole purpose and reason why I started it was to help athletes get exposure. When I got back from playing professionally, I was playing in men's leagues back home and would always see younger kids—anywhere between the ages of 17-20 years old—playing there. I was always wondering, "Why are these kids playing in these leagues and not playing basketball at different universities?" I would reach out to them to learn their stories and either figure out how I could help train them or why they weren't playing college basketball. Most of them said the same thing: lack of exposure or "coaches didn't see me." Back in high school, I (personally) didn't have much exposure. Coming from a family with a single mom and four younger brothers, it was really hard for me to play in those high-level teams that get exposure because it was too much money for my mom to afford, and it was just hard for her to send me away. I pretty much figured out in the 10th grade how to start using a camera and media software through my high school classes to make my own basketball tapes. So I would record, edit, and send out my DVDs with my stat sheets in an envelope to different universities, and that is how I got my exposure. Fast-forward to my time in college, I did the same thing. That's how I got in touch with agents, which led to my professional career. During my pro career I was like, "You know what, why don't I do something where I can help out athletes get exposure? Because if that is all they are lacking to play at the next level, why don't I create a platform that can kind of help them do that?" I started the media company and that was pretty much the main focus. We would come to athletes' games, film them, and make a little highlight package. We would be the ones to send those tapes to the coaches to get exposure for them and hopefully an opportunity (to play at the next level). After a year of doing that, I started running my own "basketball exposure" camps—where I invited coaches in Canada to come and see the kids. In my first year we were able to get four kids recruited to different universities, in my second year we had five, and it has just been growing since. The same for the colleges participating. During our first year we only had five colleges come out, seven during our second, and then seventeen last summer—so that has done really well.

You also have a basketball training company and a basketball organization. Could you share with us more about these businesses and the inspiration behind them?

Basketball training is something that I have been doing alongside my media company over the years. I officially went on my own and started my training company, NL Fitness, in 2018. This company is pretty much (focused on) basketball training—one-on-one training, partner training, clinics, camps, etc. Through that, I have had the opportunity to travel pretty much around the world to train. I have done stuff in Africa for the past three years with WNBA players, league coaches, and other professional players running basketball camps. Basketball training has really taken me around the world. This past August, I actually started my own basketball organization called Team Belief. The whole philosophy behind that name, Team Belief, is that I want kids to believe in themselves first and who they are. I want them to believe that they can achieve things because that is the biggest thing right now. Kids lack that confidence, that drive, that belief. It all starts within them though, no one can do it for them. So there are a lot of things we have instilled in our program—volunteer work, minimum grade-point average, etc.—because we want them to be successful later on and not just be “basketball players.” I am trying to build a foundation for them because basketball is eventually going to stop.



What were some of the challenges that you faced throughout these experiences? How did you overcome them?

Like anything, the biggest struggles were getting started, having a vision, and planning. When I first started my businesses, I was hearing “no” a lot. As an entrepreneur (though), you have to remember that you are going to hear “no” a lot more than you are going to hear “yes.” So it’s about finding a ‘why’, and having a ‘why’ that’s strong enough to keep pushing you forward. Your dreams themselves have to be stronger than whatever anyone tells you. If you believe in it, regardless of the time it might take you to get there, that will push you through those tough times. For me, the first couple of months it was really about just getting my name out there. I would offer my services for free to build a foundation, so that was hard. The scariest part as an entrepreneur is not knowing if you’re going to be paid this week or next week, and you still have bills that are coming. That was probably the scariest and hardest part for me when I was first getting started. You just have to keep your foot on the gas though, like anything else, and after the ball starts to get moving you will start seeing that little bit of light that motivates you to continue (pushing).

You made a great point about “finding your why” and discovering your purpose. What are some things that inspire you?

The biggest inspiration for me is my family, my mom—they are the main reason why I do anything and the reasons why I work so hard. In addition to that, I am inspired (by the opportunity) to give back. Like I mentioned earlier, growing up, I didn’t have much. Even though I had the skills, was able to play, and could compete, I lacked a lot of exposure. For me now, I want to give back to the kids. That’s what motivates me. I want to help give them those opportunities to reach their goals and dreams, without being penalized for where they are coming from or for having a lack of those financial resources. I recently started an Instagram Live series called “The Journey of an Athlete Before & After” to give back to the youth and teach them about the IQ part of basketball and also life. So my biggest why, besides my family, is really the youth—I am inspired to help, educate, and give back to others.



A lot of people are hesitant to explore different options about playing overseas or going to other countries to continue their basketball career. Reflecting back on your experience, what were some of the valuable lessons that you obtained from playing overseas?

That's a really good question. I think being on your own in another country, where you don't know anybody, might not speak the language, understand the culture, who to trust, who to believe, or anything like that (is extremely valuable). You learn how to grow up. You also learn that the world is much bigger than you think it is. That experience in itself—where you have time to reflect and see what the world is like, explore, find out how businesses work, and things like that—is big. Also, the networking part of going overseas is really huge because now you have friends in different places around the world. In terms of basketball, you have the opportunity to play with people from different countries, backgrounds, and places. You make long-term friendships. In my case for instance, where I'm running my own basketball organization, I now have those professional friends that I can call at any time and bring them to my camp. Besides playing professionally overseas, I think just getting out of your country and traveling is huge to your growth and something that people should try to experience. There is so much to learn and explore in other countries. That opportunity to further your awareness (on things) and network with other people is something I believe playing overseas brings—which is something that can propel you really far (in your future experiences).



Visit www.jamilabiad.com to learn more about his programs and initiatives

Throughout this journey, you have had an array of experiences within the business and basketball world. What are some pieces of advice that you would give to someone who is interested in owning their own business within the basketball and professional training realm?

The first thing I would say, like I said earlier, is: "You're going to hear 'no' a lot, but you can't let that derail you off from what your goal and vision is." The second thing I would say, especially if you are going to be a trainer is: "You need to have your own philosophy." In any industry you go into, there are going to be multiple people doing the same thing. What separates one person from the next is who you are, what your philosophy is, and how you treat people. Those are kind of the first things I would lay out. What is your vision? Where do you see yourself going? What are your goals? From there, I would say to develop a breakdown and understand why you are doing what you are doing—have that passion. The other thing is you just gotta grind. It's not easy. You might start (off) with one client, then have two or three, maybe more or maybe less. So it's just a grind. You have to figure out how to stay busy and how to stay involved during both those high seasons and those low seasons.

ALL-STAR WEEKEND / FEBRUARY 2020



JA MORANT

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AARON GORDON

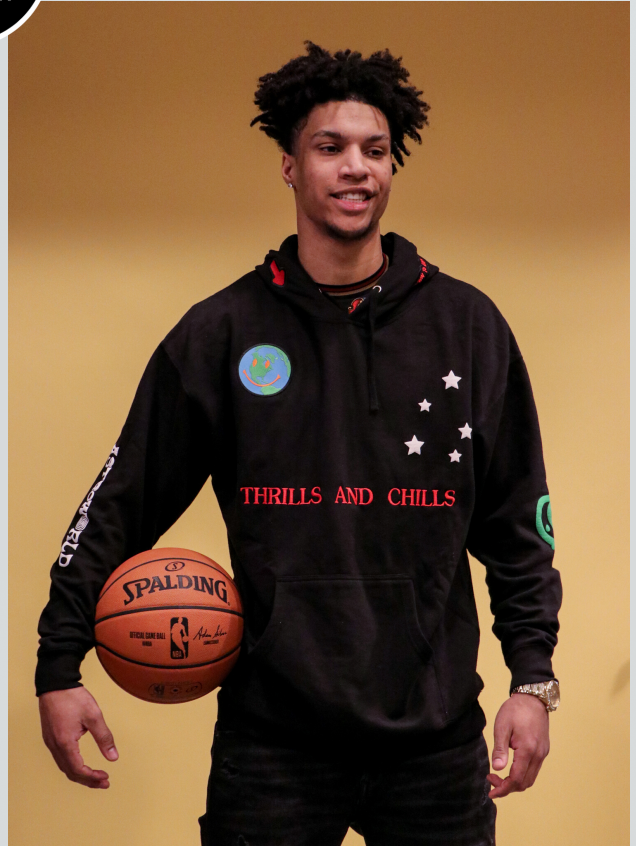


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KATIE LOU SAMUELSON

ALL-STAR WEEKEND / FEBRUARY 2020



BRANDON CLARKE



#DUMONTMEDIA



TICARA DEVONE

Sneaker Reporter

The world of fashion was a space that Ticara Devone was passionate about since a very young age. Born and raised in the West Side of Chicago, Ticara still remembers the times when she would line up to get the latest sneaker releases. **Little did she know that in a few years, she would be immersed in the world of sneaker culture.** After graduating from college, Ticara tapped into her background in music—musical theater, singing, playing the piano, and more—and began her professional career in the industry. Not only did she work as a Digital Marketing Manager for Elijah Blake, but she also wrote blogs for radio personalities such as Big Boy and Sway. **And...she didn't stop there!** Ticara also had a fashion section in her entertainment website dedicated to sharing styling tips for the latest sneaker drops. **Talk about impressive!** After four years in the music industry, Ticara was ready to step away and pursue her passion for fashion and sneaker culture full force. Shortly after, she found an opportunity with CNKDaily—an up-and-coming women's website that focused on women in sneaker culture. Ticara pitched her story and joined the team for the next three years. **The rest is history!** She currently has her own platform, TicaraDevone.com, where she shares insight into the latest sneaker releases, style tips, events around Chicago, and more. **The best part of it all is...she is just getting started!**

Reflecting back on your experience of working a full-time job while also contributing content to CNKDaily, what were some of the challenges that you faced balancing both of those things?

Oh man, it was so hard. I think that is something that people don't really talk about a lot. I learned so many things working at my advertising job that I was able to bring over to the creative sectors I was involved in after work. It was really, really hard (though) because when you do influencer things or work for a media outlet, sometimes they don't know that you work a nine-to-five. They might invite you to press events and you are thinking, "Oh I got to work (at that time)." So it's like you have to figure out, "Ok, what is the benefit of me either coming in to work late or taking a full off-day? Is it really going to benefit me if I do that?" It was a lot of that (for me)—weighing the situation and deciding which (option) was best for me. There were times where I would go to an event before I went to work or I left work early to head to an event. You know, I was making it happen but it also came at a cost.

When making that jump and embarking on the journey to building your personal brand full-time, what were some of the challenges that you encountered early on? How did you overcome them?

I can think of three things. One, being a black woman. Two, being a woman that is trying to get into sneakers and footwear—which is a male-dominated space. And three, living in a city where it's just gatekeepers—so people who won't tell you about an event that's coming up. It used to be a lot of that. I don't think it is like that as much now because I think Chicago is like a big hub for events today. I mean look at what happened during All-Star Weekend, literally every brand was here. It wasn't like that years ago (though). We just didn't have that in our city (at that time), so it was difficult trying to get your foot in the door and attending those events. I think for me, one of the main things that helped me (overcome this challenge), was writing for CNKDaily. It helped open the door (into the industry) because now I had credibility. Now, (people) could see that I was actually writing about new shoes and wasn't just trying to get into events to hang out. I was actually trying to learn about the product and was able to bring something to the table. Which is why, for me, it is important to try to bring people up with me. I know I have friends who want to be involved in this (industry), so I want to help open those doors for them too because I know how hard it was for me to get here. I want to make sure that I am giving back to somebody in some kind of way. When we have more black faces in the building, that will become a constant. It will become something that is common.

Let's talk about your tribe! Throughout this journey, how have you built your tribe or that group of people that you can count on that supports, challenges, and empowers one another?

When it comes to your tribe, you want to make sure you have people around you with your same core values. But, you also want to have people who are not afraid to tell you when you are wrong or when an idea is not the best that it can be. That's why I like to make sure I have friends who can challenge me. For instance, if they don't like an idea I have, why don't they like it? What do they think I should do instead? I need that. I feel like you need someone who knows you (enough) to know when an idea is not the best that it can be, and can help you come up with a solution to it. I have people who will send me their ideas, we will hang out and talk about life, we will discuss how we can progress in the fields that we are in, and also talk about how we can bring more people into the field who look like us. So that's the type of tribe I would say I have.

What are some things that inspire you or fuel you throughout this journey?

For me, it's showing that it can be done. I am one of the first people in my life that I know has ever taken this route that I am taking. I was the first person in my family to graduate from college. I am the first person in my family to go against the grain and not work a nine-to-five, and actually be a creative (full-time). I just want to show my little cousins and the people in my neighborhood, the West Side of Chicago, that it can be done. You don't necessarily have to be a basketball player (to make it). You don't have to go work a nine-to-five (to make it). You don't have to do what your mother did, your auntie did, your family did. You can actually take your own route and make it happen. That's what I want to show people, and that (mission) is something that inspires me throughout this journey.

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

I would say, "Be confident, be authentic, and be a true representation of yourself." Those things are what is going to be long-lasting, rather than something that is just 'hot' for the moment. By being you and continuing to learn, you are going to keep yourself around for the long-run. People can tell when something is fake. Even if it seems real from afar, once they get close, they are going to tell (it's fake). So I would just say, "Be yourself, be authentic." That is how you are going to win.

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

I would say, "Stop sleeping on your potential." I was so afraid to do stuff for so long. Not only did I think I would fall flat on my face, but I was so used to doing the same stuff for years that I was scared to step away from that foundation. I was just scared to let that go since I didn't know what was next. That's why (looking back) now, I would tell my younger self, "Take that leap of faith. Don't be so afraid, you will be fine."



Photographs courtesy of Ticara Devone (@ticaradevone)

"I just want to show my little cousins and the people in my neighborhood, the West Side of Chicago, that it can be done...You can actually take your own route and make it happen."

-Ticara on her sources of inspiration throughout this journey.

BRIA JANELLE

*Media Personality | Host & Emcee |
Co-founder of Made for the W*



Photographs courtesy of Bria Janelle (@iambriajanelle)

Sports & entertainment emcee, Bria Janelle, was passionate about the world of sports from a very young age. Not only did she play basketball at the collegiate level at Mars Hill University, but she was also determined to pursue a professional career in the game upon graduation. **In the blink of an eye though, everything changed.** After getting injured during her junior year of college, Bria began to reflect on life outside of basketball. Shortly after, she transferred to Georgia Southern University (GSU) where she pursued an undergraduate degree in Communications and Public Relations, and discovered her interest in radio. Upon graduating from GSU, Bria worked for a radio station in Atlanta called Streetz 94.5, but still felt like there was a missing component in her life—sports. **Suddenly, it all clicked. There was a way for her to merge both worlds!** Bria discovered the lifestyle side of sports—a space where she could pursue her interest in entertainment, while still tying it back to her love for basketball. It was the perfect mix. **Needless to say, it has been a movie ever since.** Today, Bria is not only known as “The Voice of Atlanta Basketball,” but she is also recognized across the industry for her incredible contributions off-the-court. One of them being Made for the W—a lifestyle platform she co-founded alongside Melani Carter and Simran Kaleka committed to creating inclusion for women’s sports and sneaker culture. **Her legacy continues to be strengthened in the world of sports, and man does it extend beyond the game!**

From collaborating with brands to emceeing at different events, you have done incredible things within the hosting space. Could you share more with us about how you got started building your personal brand in the industry?

I had always felt like I was different, but I just didn’t know how. Going back to my sophomore year of college, I wrote for the school newspaper and they asked us (one day), “There is a lady coming in to speak on campus. Does anybody want to go talk to her?” I was like, “I’ll do it. I have never done an interview in my life, but I love meeting people.” It just so happens that the day of (the event), my editor calls me and says “Hey, I just wanted to give you a heads up about our guest. I hope you are prepared, just make sure you look at your questions, etc.” I was like, “Cool! Who is our guest?”—because she had never told us. The guest just happened to be Maya Angelou. She was my first interview that I had ever done in life. It lasted all of probably 30 seconds, and she said something to me that I have held onto (since). She said, “There is something about you. Your voice has the ability to change nations.” For me, I thought it was basketball because (at the time) I was a sophomore playing the sport, doing well in it, and was even on the All-American Watch List. The way that life has panned out, instead of basketball, it has been my voice. My voice is very distinctive. When people hear me hosting, for instance, they are like “Oh shoot, I knew that was you because I heard your voice.” Maya Angelou, God bless her soul, went on to be a great mentor of my life. People always say “unfinished business” and “carrying the torch, and I think that is what it is for me—I owe it to her to make sure that my voice is heard globally. So to answer your question, I knew that what I had was different just because it had been spoken into me before I (even) knew it. She saw something in me that I didn’t see in myself. To be able to use my voice now as a talent, that little feeling on the inside saying “Oh man, I did it!” is a great feeling that’s beyond me.

Throughout this journey of building your personal brand, what are some things that have inspired and fueled you?

Continuing to carry on the words that Maya Angelou (spoke to me)—those seeds that she planted in my life early—is my inspiration. She saw something in me when I was 19-20 years old, that me being 31, I am just now starting to see. I think just seeking out what that means (fuels me). Also, my family inspires me. My mom and my grandparents are my driving force. They are my why. For me it’s like, I want them to see the reason why I am living my ancestors’ wildest dreams.

In addition to hosting and emceeing, you have also co-founded another platform, Made for the W, that highlights athletes in the industry. Could you share more with us about the process of creating this platform that celebrates female athletes?

For sure! My business partners, Simran Kaleka and Melani Carter, and I actually met each other through the Summer Pro AM League that I host. We share a love and passion for women in sports. We saw that there was a void within women in sports and culture that needed to be filled, so just putting our heads together, we were like "What could we do that could really give these women a dope platform outside of the stereotypes that they are given?" There are so many dope women that don't get an opportunity to be seen. For us, we wanted to be that platform that showcases these women. That is how Made for the W was born.

Throughout this journey, you guys have collaborated with an array of athletes and brands. What has that experience been like for you?

It has been a really dope experience. Every day, we wake up ready to go and get it. We want to make sure that we leave the game better than what we found (it)—both on and off the court. For us it's like, "How do we do our part in sticking to the mission and the goal of what Made for the W is built on?" It is pretty cool (to see) all that has been able to come with it. We are enjoying every bit of it. We love what we do and the fact that other people love the platform that we have built (as well), it just makes it so much better.

You have worked a lot with the youth and are really passionate about mentoring and creating opportunities for the next generation. What has been that driving force behind your desire to pay it forward?

I have a passion for young people, in particular young women who are wanting to get into the sports and entertainment industry. I feel like for me, when I was coming up ten years ago when I started, no one wanted to mentor me or everybody was afraid that (mentoring me) would mean I would come and take their spot. For me it was like, "We are not competing. I genuinely want to learn." So now, I want to be that reaching hand to the next person that wants to come up. I believe that you inspire until you expire. When I say that, I mean this: when you look at in-between your birth and death date—that dash—that to me is defined as purpose. When you look at purpose, it's like, "What do you want people to say about you when it is all set and done?" For me, I want people to say, "She paid it forward. She helped me in some form of fashion. She mentored me, etc." I try to be a resource whenever I can. I don't have it all figured out—I am still learning every day—, but from what I do know I definitely want to teach the next person. That is how the marathon continues and your legacy continues.

Reflecting back on your personal journey, what is a piece of advice that you would give to your younger self and why? Any additional pieces of advice you would give to others?

I would tell my younger self, "Don't be afraid to take a risk. Try not to care about what other people think because nobody can run your race for you." I really think that is true. Whether it is in sports, entertainment, or life, I think we are always worried about "What if I'm not good at this?" We need to step away (from that). For instance, I don't come from a musical or sports family, but I was able to figure both out. I would also say, "Don't stop being creative." My mom always tells me this, "If they are not laughing at your dreams, they are not big enough." This is what I did. I wrote down everything I wanted to achieve in life, and I circled the top five things that I was like, "This is what I want to achieve when it is all set and done. For the rest of my life, I am going to focus on achieving those top five goals." Some of them are very obtainable goals, some of them are goals for 20-30 years from now—but that's why I (would) really just say, "Focus on what you want to do and do it."



"It's simple: be a student of the game. Be coachable. Have that desire to learn. I think the difference between good and great are just small steps that people happen to miss."

- Bria on skills that can propel someone to excel in the sports industry.

SEAN DANIEL

Photographer | LeagueFits / SLAM*Photographs courtesy of Sean Daniel (@1shotsean)*

Sean Daniel discovered his passion for sports photography in an unexpected way. For this New York native, his background in basketball was always something that drew him to the game and fueled his interest in the world of sports. Yet, he never expected to embark on a journey where he would be collaborating with some of the industry's leading brands and capturing images of the league's top athletes. **It all started during his time in college.** After purchasing a camera his junior year, Sean began going to different college games, training sessions, and events to photograph different athletes. Day after day, he continued to reach out to sports professionals and build his network in Texas. Soon enough, he had fostered a strong platform where athletes would reach out to him with opportunities to photograph their games and gym sessions. **Sean hasn't looked back ever since.** He has not only received the opportunity to photograph an array of NBA games for SLAM Magazine, but he has also secured an internship with LeagueFits—an Instagram platform that merges style and the NBA. As Sean begins his senior year this fall, he is looking forward to pushing the boundary in creative storytelling further, and is excited to share his vision with others through his captivating sports photography.

You are currently working with LeagueFits and SLAM. Could you share more with us about your role with the organization and the process of obtaining that internship?

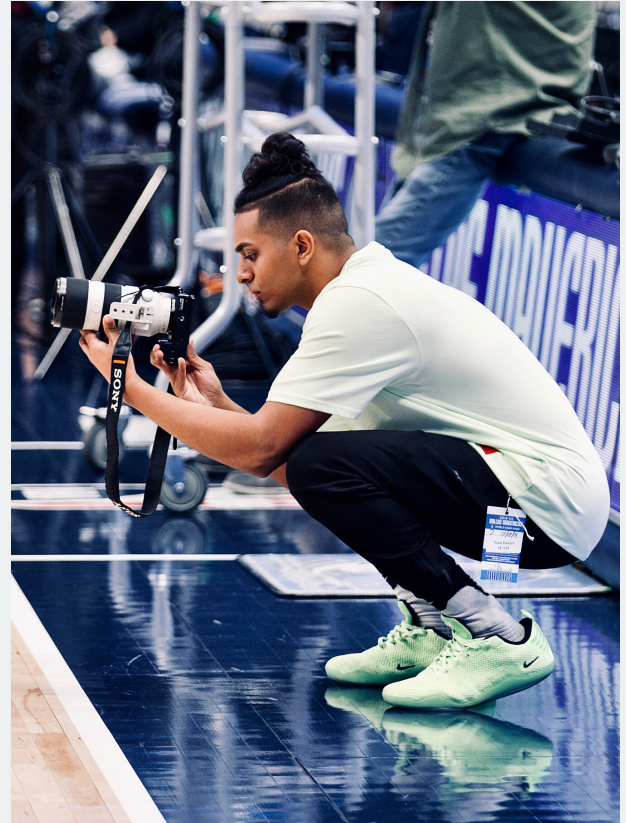
Of course! So this past summer I went back home to New York, and SLAM was having a notorious basketball (event) at Dyckman Park. I reached out to the person who was in charge of credentials, she was extremely nice, and I (was able to) get passes. During the event, J.R. Smith came to the park and I had taken some pictures of him. I posted them the next morning and sent them to my boss Ian—who runs LeagueFits; He liked them, had tossed them up (on social media), and that is what kind of kicked off our relationship. After that, he tweeted a few weeks later that he was looking for an intern for LeagueFits. So I applied, not really thinking anything of it, and he had reached back out saying, "Hey! Do you want to hop on a call and talk about some stuff...fashion, LeagueFits, SLAM, etc." Luckily, I (then) got blessed with the opportunity to be an intern with them. When that kicked off, it kind of came out fast. I was an intern before the NBA season started and got (a chance) to create content consistently for them—not necessarily going places and taking pictures of players. That was also a great way of networking and getting my start with LeagueFits. I also had the (awesome) opportunity to go to NBA games for them and do work for LeagueFits and SLAM Kicks. Those experiences were a huge eye-opener for me. Being a young professional (in the industry), going to NBA games (to photograph), it's weird being in the media room and (realizing) you're the youngest kid. For me, I was nervous going into my first Mavs game. I didn't really have the resources to reach out to people and ask, "Hey, you shoot NBA games..where do you go (to photograph), etc?" I didn't have any of that. I didn't know a lot of people that were photographing NBA games, so that was kind of tough for me. During the season, my work with LeagueFits was focused on looking for trends, doing stuff with certain partnerships, creating content, hopping on calls, thinking about the marketing side of things, heading strategies, and more. That was kind of a different thing for me because it was more than just photography. I personally love it though. I love working with them. They are great people. They genuinely care about you. It really has been a blessing. It has been amazing to be a first-year photographer and getting the opportunity to go to NBA games and travel as well.

As a full-time student, how has that process of going to school while simultaneously building your personal brand been like?

It has been tough. When I started with photography, I kind of went on a limb. My parents were like, “Don’t get distracted with your camera. Always remember that school is your priority, not going and taking pictures or videos.” So at first, it was hard trying to go from class straight to a high school or college game. It was just tough trying to find time to balance schoolwork and doing photography. I had a little phase where I wanted to drop out (of school) because I just didn’t have any motivation. I am a kinesiology major and I wanted to do physical therapy, but being in class, I wasn’t locked in. I wasn’t engaged. I was looking at pictures online, my Lightroom, my Photoshop, and other photography things. My focus was really off and it was just difficult trying to balance things, especially when it came to studying for tests. It was a tough task for me, but I got the hang of it and was able to push through. Seeing what we are going through with this pandemic now though is really my motivation to make sure I have a backup plan (as well).

You mentioned that going into the sports industry was an unexpected journey that you embarked on. What were some of the challenges that you faced early on? How did you overcome them?

One of the biggest things for me, challenge-wise, was my (lack of) connections in the industry early on. I didn’t really know anybody in the sports industry itself or anyone who was within the creative space in sports. I did have some connections with players and guys on different teams, but I didn’t have anyone that could tell me, “Hey this is how you reach out to people and get credentials. This is how you reach out to players and coaches to get into games and practices, etc.” That was kind of my biggest challenge at the start, especially coming from New York to Texas, I didn’t know anybody. It was a whole fresh start (for me). Nobody knew who I was, I didn’t know who anybody was. My whole thinking was, “This is the age of content. Everybody wants content. Everyone wants photos and videos.” I just took a step into that. So, I think challenge-wise, that was one of the biggest (adversities) I encountered early on—that fear of not knowing how to do certain things, who to contact, and how to enter (the industry).



Diving more into the array of experiences that you have had with LeagueFits and SLAM—content creation, marketing, digital media, and photography. Looking back at your experiences, what are some skills that you think are valuable for someone to have to excel in the industry?

I would definitely say being personable and flexible. With us, for instance, we have to go through so many DMs, organizations, companies, partnerships, etc. Being able to be flexible with companies and different organizations that you collaborate with goes a long way. You have to be able to not take things to heart. It’s not that (companies) don’t like your work or they don’t like what you are picking. They just have stuff to go by. They have a standard and you have to meet that. Also, I think being able to be creative (is crucial), and remembering that it is a team effort through it all is important.

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

I made a lot of mistakes when I first started because I really didn’t know anything about photography. So for example, I would send people pictures through text messages—without knowing that it took the quality off once you posted it on Instagram. I also didn’t know (about) certain settings within my camera that would have been helpful during times when I was in a dark gym or venue. So, I wish I would (have) had that type of knowledge early on. I would also say the biggest thing was my editing. I think knowing what I wanted to do with editing—in terms of my style and the way I edited photos—would have also been great. That’s the good thing about photography (though), you can always go back and re-edit or re-upload pictures. To me, I think that shows personal growth and progress.

JESSICA SLATE

Digital Media | Connecticut Sun

Photographs courtesy of Jessica Slate (@thejslate)

For Jessica Slate, pursuing a professional career in sports was a goal she was determined to achieve since she was a student in high school. From working with the baseball team to doing film for the basketball team, Jessica began gaining experience in the world of sports and strengthening her love for the industry at a young age.

By the time she got to college, she was ready for take off.

During her time at the University of Texas at Austin, Jessica continued to build her experience by working for organizations such as Longhorn Network and Fox Sports West. Upon graduation, she returned to her hometown of San Luis Obispo, California, and worked as a photojournalist for a local TV station called KSBY. Even though her role didn't focus on the world of sports at that time, Jessica was committed to learning as much as she could about editing, journalism, and videography.

This level of initiative would not only prove to be extremely valuable as her career progressed, but it would also reflect her commitment to being a versatile professional in the industry.

Shortly after, Jessica was ready for the next chapter. She was ready to take that leap and make her dreams a reality. After moving to Arizona, Jessica worked as the Director of Social Media as well as the Play-By-Play Broadcaster for Arizona Christian University.

She has continued to grow more and more in the industry ever since.

From working as the In-Arena Host for the NBA Phoenix Suns to doing an array of digital reporting for the league, Jessica has continued paving her path in the industry. Currently, she is working for the WNBA Connecticut Sun and NLL New England Black Wolves as their Digital Media Specialist, and works alongside a creative team to design, manage, and publish content across their social platforms.

You started your career in the journalism and broadcasting side of things, but are now focusing on the digital media realm. How has this transition been like for you?

When I started working in sports, I was committed to using my communication skills to try and help create more unique experiences. I started in (the industry) doing broadcasting and play-by-play analysis—I covered the Lakers for a little bit doing game analysis—but I really wanted to follow wherever the path took me. I didn't want to just focus on a particular role and climb up one ladder. For me, it was important to be a utility player and have as many skills as possible to be as helpful as possible wherever I worked. For instance, while in my current role I am working in social and digital media, it has been helpful for me to know what type of work our videographers and reporters are doing so I can be a better teammate to them. My previous experience within those areas has helped. I think sometimes social media can be overlooked because it is such an easy tool for so many people to access, but (having the chance) to create (unique) content for these platforms is the really cool part about it.

Let's talk about personal branding! How was that process of building your personal brand early on in your career?

I think branding gets overlooked a lot of the time. I know that is definitely an issue that athletes face as well because people are constantly changing, finding new interests, or different styles. For me, when I was in college, they really emphasized creating an image for yourself and sticking to that. While my style and interests may change, I have always been really passionate about advocating for athletes and using my communication skills to help them—all while being as authentic and as real as possible. Which is why, in my personal social media, it is not going to be just work. You are going to get to see a little bit of my personal life as well. I want to be as balanced and as approachable as possible. When I create social media (content) for teams, I try to do the same thing. I like to include that fun, raw, authentic content as well. It doesn't always have to be this super manufactured product because I think having those real moments are important to any brand. Finding something that is really important to you and keeping that at the forefront is something that I think is really important in personal branding.

You made a great point earlier regarding the power of networking and building genuine relationships. What are some tips that you would give to younger audiences when it comes to networking?

The biggest factor of networking is that you need to go into it with the intention of building connections, relationships, and friendships—not with the (intention) of getting things out of people. LinkedIn, of course, is a really huge tool for networking. But, you can do a lot more informal communication and relationship-building through Instagram or Twitter with general reactions or direct messages (for example). People are really helpful in the sports industry, but they like to build relationships and help people that they are familiar with. So (I think) introducing yourself, getting to know someone, and building that relationship first goes a long way. For instance, all of my opportunities have come from previously building a relationship (with a person), and that person thinking of me when they have an opportunity. Rather than me asking for opportunities and working to build a relationship later on, I have worked to (keep) the relationship-building process at the forefront.

Transitioning into your sources of inspiration and motivation, what are some things that inspire you throughout this journey?

Growing up and even now, I have always been really inspired by Doris Burke, Kristen Ledlow, and other powerful female figures in sports. Sports is such a male-dominated industry that I think keeping track of women like that—that are doing such a great job—has been important. That has (also) been what is so exciting about working in the WNBA for me. There are so many people that I wish we could continue broadening their audience for and expose people to because they are just such great influencers, in basketball and the world in general. I have really enjoyed watching the Instagram Live with Sue Bird and different figures in sports (for instance). That is one of the perks of social media—just getting to appeal to a broader audience in a much more casual platform. To me, things like that influence and inspire me to continue creating content, sharing stories, and broadening my platforms.

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

My entire mentality working in sports, regardless of the role, is working as hard as the athletes that you are working around. Whether you are in digital media, want to go into coaching, or want to do broadcasting, think about applying your craft the same way you would as an athlete. So, you have to have your practice, your film, your sessions where you are bouncing ideas off people, and putting in that same commitment. That way, when your version of a game day comes, you are as prepared as them. I think preparation is really important. Preparation can really separate people—as confident as you are on something, it is key (to remember that) you can never be overprepared, but you can be underprepared. This will allow you to perform at the highest level and give the (highest) quality you can, especially in situations where other people's roles rely on yours.



"My entire mentality working in sports, regardless of the role, is working as hard as the athletes that you are working around. Whether you are in digital media, want to go into coaching, or want to do broadcasting, think about applying your craft the same way you would as an athlete."

- Jessica on advice she would give to someone interested in pursuing a career in sports.

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“

You don't have to be great to get started, but you have to get started to be great.

”

LES BROWN

“

Work hard in silence. Let success make the noise.

”

UNKNOWN

“

If you can see it in your mind, you can hold it in your hand.

”

BOB PROCTOR

“

Don't let anyone turn your sky into a ceiling.

”

RITA ZAHARA

“

Don't downgrade your dream just to fit your reality. Upgrade your conviction to match your destiny.

”

UNKNOWN

“

Don't go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.

”

RALPH WALDO EMERSON



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