

An Interview with

Walt *'The Wizard'* Williams

MNHC: Walt 'The Wizard' Williams, you were in the NBA for eleven years...that's a long time these days. What do you think helped to prepare you for the life of a professional basketball player?

Walt Williams: Well I have to give a lot of the credit to the coaches that I played for in terms of honing my skills, but when it comes to 'life' as a pro athlete, I must say that my family, friends and the community prepared me by making sure that I always stayed humble. When you enter into the life of a professional athlete you are given a lot of special treatment. You can either go overboard with it, or keep it in perspective. Some people will take advantage of the special treatment, but for the most part, I have tried to help others with my celebrity status.

MNHC: Which teams did you play for in the NBA?

Walt Williams: I was drafted by the Sacramento Kings in the first round #7. I also played for the Miami Heat, Portland Trailblazers, Houston Rockets, Toronto Raptors, and the Dallas Mavericks.

MNHC: Today your hometown of Prince George's County, Maryland is considered by ESPN to be the 'Hotbed' for basketball. How do you feel about this?

Walt Williams: I think it's great that Prince George's County has finally been recognized nationally, and I am really happy to be a part of the Maryland National Hoops Classic. This type of national exposure is truly deserved for our players, coaches, schools and the community. But honestly, I have played around the world and other areas pale in comparison to the caliber of players that we have always had in our neighborhoods on a consistent basis. I never played in The Boys and Girls Clubs, or any other organized basketball until I went to high school. I honed my skills directly on the community playgrounds. Some of my hardest fought games were pick-up games on the outdoor courts...sweat dripping, jawing, and just having the time of my life...with friends!

MNHC: So, you went out for the team during your high school years, at Crossland, H.S. Who was your most fierce competitor in High School?

Walt Williams: Wow! Can I pick more than one? Can I pick three?

MNHC: Yes.

Walt Williams: I would say Henry Hall, from Parkdale, H.S., Mike Tate from Oxon Hill, H.S. and Byron Tucker, from Potomac H.S. Oh, I need a fourth.... and Jay Bias, from Northwestern H.S.

MNHC: You stated earlier that you never played for the Boys and Girls Club. Why?

Walt Williams: I don't really know, I think I had a lot of exposure to basketball. When I was growing up, basketball was really big as a neighborhood pick-up game. I wasn't a real tall kid until I went to high school. In high school I grew eight inches. I think that was when people began to notice me.

MNHC: You attribute your staying on the high school basketball team to your sister, Stephanie Williams (Edmundson). How was she such a big influence on you?

Walt Williams: My sister Stephanie noticed that I was skipping basketball practice to be with my friends...and man she laid me out! She told me that I wasn't doing anything with my life



and that I needed to get focused and serious. She made me mad, but I knew she was right, so I stopped skipping practice and became more dedicated to not only basketball, but my school work and to having a better attitude.

MNHC: Basketball became a huge part of your life, how do you see young boys and girls today figuring basketball into their lives?

Walt Williams: I never had any idea that I could be an NBA player as a high school student. I always thought NBA players came from 'somewhere else.' It never was a remote reality for me until the day I saw Len Bias get drafted. Today there are so many role models from our community, but the reality is still they are the exception. As someone who loves the game of basketball, I would tell anyone not to let it totally consume your world to the point that you begin to believe that it is your only possible vehicle for success. I am proud to talk to kids and let them know that I came from the same place as them. I encourage them to work hard for their dreams because all things are possible.

MNHC: Walt, can you give our kids a ten (10) second commercial using words that you have lived your life by?

Walt Williams: Oh, that's easy... I would you say, "There is no substitute for hard work and determination.... because the payoff will always make you a better person.

MNHC: Who was your fiercest competitor in the NBA?

Walt Williams: First, let me go on record to say that I think Michael Jordan was and still is the greatest basketball player ever, but because my offensive skills outshined my defense, my coaches never matched me up against him. I would say Scottie Pippen was my fiercest competitor because he was so long and so quick that he was tougher for me to score against ... but I am sure I still dropped at least 20 points on him in a game!

MNHC: Now that your NBA playing career is behind you. How do you stay connected to the sport?

Walt Williams: After retiring from the NBA, I was the post game analyst for the Washington Wizards for 2 years. Today I am a radio analyst for CBS Sports Group for the Maryland Terps.



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