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Feature

Allan Houston's Most Meaningful Points

By: Shawn Dove

Former New York Knicks All-Star guard Allan Houston is still scoring points. His feathery jump shot is unforgettable – one of the smoothest in the history of the National Basketball Association. So is the game winning, buzzer-beating shot he drained in 1999 in the deciding game of a first-round playoff battle against the Miami Heat, sending the Knicks on an improbable run to the NBA Championship Series.



Yet Allan Houston's biggest shots, and no doubt most memorable, are now being made not in front of 20,000 fans on the Madison Square Garden hardwood, but in relative off-court obscurity through the work of his Allan Houston Foundation. Through his foundation, Houston is laying the groundwork for the creation of the Allan Houston Life Enrichment Center in Harlem, a multi-faceted community resource which seeks to use the game of basketball to empower residents socially, intellectually and spiritually. At the heart of the work coming out of the Life Enrichment Center will be the promotion of education, youth mentoring and strategies to strengthen father/son relationships.

This is not a new idea for the 35-year-old Houston. This summer the Allan Houston Foundation will host its third annual "Father Knows Best" Basketball Retreat August 4th – 6th just north of the Bronx in Tarrytown and Brewster, New York. By playing

basketball together and learning pro skills from Allan and his father, Coach Wade Houston, fathers and sons at the retreat “will obtain a new dimension to their relationship and share a memorable experience with interpersonal strategies to last a lifetime,” according to the retreat’s mission.

The faith-based event will bring together 60 – 75 pairs of fathers and sons (or mentors and mentees) for a fun-filled weekend of high-powered basketball and life skills lessons. The premise of the retreat, according to Houston, “is that the relationship between a father and his son is so important – it is no secret that our young men today need strong male figures, whether it’s a grandfather, step-dad, neighbor or mentor.

“Now in its third year, the retreat is proof positive that with a plan and persistence [and solid teammates, of course] visions and dreams can become reality. “I started it because I had a vision four years ago where a father and son could bond and play basketball together where they could see a lot of things that they couldn’t see on television,” Houston said of the genesis of the retreat. “That was my initial vision, but what was really fun about it was they just weren’t playing basketball. We brought in musical guests and we wanted to have a spiritual undertone – a spiritual legacy that really reflected that our Heavenly Father knows best.”

The creation of the basketball retreat is a needed reminder that we do not have to look far for effective youth development and community building strategies. Often we just need to seek to replicate the things that worked in our own lives. Allan Houston’s inspiring relationship with his father, Wade Houston, is a classic example of this. “The reason why the basketball retreat meant so much to me is because of my dad,” said Houston.

It’s no news flash that many of our sons are growing up without the presence of their fathers in their lives. The beauty of the Father Knows Best Basketball Retreat is that young men can attend the camp not only with their fathers, but also with mentors or adult relatives if their fathers are not in their lives. “I think that the reality is a lot of times there are points in your life where there are things you cannot share with your parents and you need positive feedback and encouragement from someone you can look up to and respect,” said Houston.

“That was an important role for me. Some of the coaches I played for and the teachers I’ve had were instrumental to my success,” Houston recalled. “When I got out of college there were spiritual counselors that helped me through the NBA. There is always going to be a role for a positive male figure whether you have a father or not.”

The foundation partners with community organizations and faith-based mentoring programs to recruit the youth/adult pairs for the camp. The foundation selects the pairs through an application process. There are always more applications than slots available for the retreat. In addition to the basketball activities at the 2006 “Fathers Knows Best” Basketball Retreat, participants will enjoy workshops, interactive games, a talent show, concert and a worship service. The basketball retreat is just one of several strategic programs Houston has created to make a difference in the

lives of young people, especially young Black men in the Harlem community, where there is a shortage of male volunteers to support the mentoring programs in the Harlem community.

“I think people just really have to realize that where they are no one got there themselves,” said Houston. “As males we have a huge responsibility. It is a legacy that is passed down. You have to understand the importance of not just our generation. We have to think about what we are going to leave behind besides just a bank account. What really touches my heart is my relationship with my dad. When I go out and speak I am connected with young Black males and I take it very seriously.”

With major accomplishments on the court during his career, Houston is seriously making a difference off the court that will far outlast any NBA highlight reel.

For more information on the 2006 “Father Knows Best” Basketball Retreat, visit www.allanhouston.com or email fkbretrat@allanhouston.com.

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