

= David Falk =

David B. Falk (born 1950) is an American sports agent who primarily works with basketball players in the National Basketball Association . Falk began his career representing professional tennis players for Donald Dell 's ProServ and is best known for representing sports icon Michael Jordan for the entirety of Jordan 's career . Besides Jordan , Falk has represented more than 100 other NBA players , and is generally considered to be the most influential player agent the NBA has seen . During the peak years of Falk 's career in the 1990s , he was often considered the second @-@ most powerful person in the NBA behind Commissioner David Stern , and in 2000 he had at least one client on all but two NBA teams . He was listed among the " 100 Most Powerful People in Sports " for 12 straight years from 1990 to 2001 by The Sporting News , and was also named one of the Top 50 Marketers in the United States by Advertising Age in 1995 .

Falk negotiated the then @-@ highest contracts in NBA history for Patrick Ewing and Danny Ferry . He also negotiated professional sports ' first \$ 100 million contract for Alonzo Mourning as part of an unprecedented free agency period , during which his company , FAME , changed the entire salary structure of the NBA , negotiating more than \$ 400 million in contracts for its free agent clients in a six @-@ day period .

In January 2007 , Falk re @-@ launched FAME , and today serves as its founder and CEO . He represented 9 players in 2012 ; in the prime of his sports agent career in the 1990s he represented as many as 40 players at a time .

= = Personal life = =

Falk was born to a middle @-@ class Jewish family on Long Island , New York , the second of three children . Falk 's father had never finished high school and owned two butcher shops on Long Island , while his mother , Pearl Falk , had two master 's degrees , spoke six languages , and had worked as an interpreter in World War II for Nelson Rockefeller in Latin American affairs . Falk described his mother , a teacher and inspirational force as " a perfectionist " , and called her " the biggest influence in my life " , the one who drove him to achieve great heights .

" Nothing was really ever good enough . I brought home my college board scores ? I think I got just under 1 @,@ 400 the first time . She was crushed . She didn 't understand how I could do so poorly . I think that I share a lot of those qualities . She used to have an expression that I would say is the guiding principle of my life : Always shoot for the stars and never settle for second best . "

Falk 's mother was an avid New York Knicks fan , a fact which influenced Falk 's career decision upon his career path . Longtime childhood friend and colleague , Attorney Reid Kahn , remembers Falk proclaiming that he wanted to represent professional athletes in the fourth grade . Another high school friend noted that Falk was not good enough to make any of the teams at Douglas MacArthur High School (Levittown , New York) , but that he was an ardent sports fan who frequently watched baseball games at Shea Stadium .

He graduated Syracuse University in 1972 , with a degree in economics , and subsequently , George Washington University Law School , where he earned a J.D. with honors in 1975 .

During his law school years , his parents separated . Falk maintained minimal contact with his father , but remained very close with his mother until her death in 1988 .

Falk lives in Rockville , Maryland with his wife , Rhonda (Frank) . Rhonda served as an undergraduate admissions counselor for George Washington University for five years , where she recruited students from the New England area as well as from the Caribbean . For 10 years she worked as a production manager for STSC , a software company in Rockville , Maryland . She later moved into the software publishing division and managed the distribution and sales of software through international resellers around the world . She also serves on the board of directors of Woodmont Country Club .

The Falks have two daughters , Daina , (born 1983) an honors graduate of Duke University and an accomplished Beverly Hills photographer , and Jocelyn (born 1988) , a dean 's list student majoring in television and communication at Syracuse University .

= = Sports marketing , promotions , and contracts = =

= = = ProServ and signing of Michael Jordan = = =

After many attempts to establish contact with agents Bob Woolf of Boston and Larry Fleisher , Falk turned to ProServ 's Donald Dell in 1974 . Falk attempted to get Dell on the phone for " six or seven weeks . " Finally , annoyed at Dell 's seeming unavailability , Falk called Dell 's office " about 17 times in a three @-@ hour period " until Dell took his call . When Dell informed him that ProServ was not hiring , Falk offered to work for free . Dell consented to take on Falk as an unpaid intern while he was attending law school , finally offering him a full @-@ time job starting at \$ 13 @,@ 000 after his graduation from George Washington University Law School in 1975 .

Dell was a former pro tennis player and primarily represented tennis players , so he allowed Falk to handle a large portion of ProServ 's NBA dealings . Falk proved to be a capable agent and negotiator , as he signed the # 1 NBA Draft picks in 1976 (John Lucas) and 1981 (Mark Aguirre) , and negotiated the first million @-@ dollar NBA shoe deal for James Worthy in 1982 .

ProServ had an inside track with North Carolina after they successfully represented a number of N.C. basketball alumni , including Tom LaGarde , Phil Ford , Dudley Bradley , and James Worthy . In 1984 , the same year Michael Jordan entered the NBA Draft , Frank Craighill and Lee Fentress , two of Dell 's ProServ partners , left to start a competing firm , Advantage International . Dell and Falk signed # 3 pick Jordan , while Craighill and Fentress signed Sam Perkins .

= = = Nike shoe deal : " Air Jordan " = = =

After signing Jordan , Falk quickly made the first great deal for him : the Nike shoe deal . At the start of the 80s , only Kareem Abdul @-@ Jabbar had a six @-@ figure shoe deal for \$ 100 @,@ 000 (with Adidas) , and Nike was a small player next to companies like Converse , which had virtually owned the market on basketball shoes through the 1970s . After James Worthy signed an 8 @-@ year , \$ 1 @.@ 2 million endorsement deal with New Balance in 1982 , also negotiated by Falk , Falk decided to make large demands to shoe companies for Jordan 's services , including his own shoe line and a royalty .

" We decided to stretch the envelope " , Falk said . " Instead of calling up the companies and asking them how much they would pay Michael Jordan , we called them up and asked them to make a presentation and explain what they could do to promote him . Needless to say , this got a lot of quizzical replies . "

Unbeknownst to Falk and Jordan , Nike had decided to target Jordan as their player of the future . Jordan himself was initially reticent ; throughout college he had worn Converse because of the company 's endorsement deal with Tar Heels coach Dean Smith , and off the court , he wore Adidas . Jordan had never worn or even seen a Nike shoe before the company contacted him .

Nike 's initial offer was \$ 250 @,@ 000 , his own shoe line , and a percentage of the revenues . Jordan already had a standing offer from Adidas for \$ 500 @,@ 000 , and Falk demanded that Nike match the figure in addition to the revenue percentage . Nike came back with an offer of \$ 500 @,@ 000 and a smaller cut . Falk agreed .

" David Falk elected to take more guaranteed money and less revenue percentage " , said (Nike Scout) Sonny Vaccaro . " So out of the chute he lost himself a lot of money . But in retrospect , it really amounted to nothing . It wasn 't a big @-@ time bidding war . Probably the most determining thing was Adidas wasn 't going to offer him a lot of money . It was the first time that the athlete was going to share in the royalties of the shoe . That was the gamble . "

The deal was all the more significant because it was considered difficult to market African @-@ American players in 1984 , especially in a team sport like basketball . In fact , Nike insisted on several " outs " in its initial contract with Jordan : the shoe line could be dropped if certain sales figures were not met , or if Jordan failed to make the NBA All @-@ Star Game in his first three years

. The shoe line was expected to earn \$ 3 million for Nike in about three to four years . As it turned out , the Air Jordan sneaker earned Nike \$ 130 million in 1985 alone , making their \$ 500 @, @ 000 contract with Jordan one of the great bargains of all time , a precursor to Jordan 's more lucrative deals with Nike , including a 1997 deal for \$ 30 million . Jordan 's relationship with Nike is often considered the most successful sports endorsement relationship in history .

= = = Marketing Michael Jordan = = =

Falk soon proved himself to be a capable agent with many innovative marketing ideas . He allowed Nike to establish Jordan 's primary image , then began splitting it up among other advertisers , including Coca @-@ Cola , Chevrolet , Gatorade , McDonald 's , Ball Park Franks , Wilson Sporting Goods , Rayovac , Wheaties , Hanes , and MCI . Falk 's ideas stretched to all areas of the marketplace , including a fragrance (called simply " Michael Jordan ") made by the Beverly Hills designer Bijan , which was cited as the best @-@ marketed product of 1996 by the American Marketing Association . Falk even came up with the idea of teaming Bugs Bunny and Jordan together in a feature film , and then sold the concept to Warner Bros. in 1993 . The ensuing film , Space Jam , was executive produced by Falk and released in 1996 . Perhaps most importantly , Falk " set a precedent by ' opting out ' Jordan from the league 's licensing program , in effect reclaiming Jordan 's image for his own use . " Jordan himself was very grateful for his agent 's remarkable negotiating and marketing abilities , even with Falk 's penchant for making powerful enemies along the way .

" A lot of people don 't like David , but he 's the best at what he does " , Jordan told USA Today last year . " What he does is get underneath your skin , whoever he 's negotiating with , because he figures out what your objectives are , your angles . He understands the market ; he understands the players . He 's a brash , arrogant , egotistical , aggressive negotiator , which is good , because when you have someone represent you , you want him to do that . Marketing @-@ wise , he 's great . He 's the one who came up with the concept of ' Air Jordan . ' "

Due partly to Falk 's tenacity and partly to Michael Jordan 's own professional success and personal magnetism , Jordan became " indisputably the most powerful and effective endorser of products in American history , ... (making) the business of hawking products more lucrative than playing the game . " Jordan 's success was such that he turned down \$ 300 million worth of endorsement deals in the space of 4 months in 1998 .

= = = ProServ split , establishment and sale of FAME = = =

In 1992 , after great early success , Falk considered himself underpaid and underappreciated . He split with ProServ and Donald Dell to establish his own company , Falk Associates Management Enterprises (FAME) .

" I paid more in taxes this year (1996) than I earned in 17 years working for Donald Dell " , Falk said with some lingering bitterness . " I 'm all for loyalty , but that has to be a two @-@ way street . "

In the split , a messy professional divorce , Falk brought all of his considerable client list with him , but agreed to provide Dell with 50 % of fees for Dell 's former clients and 17 @. @ 5 % of Falk 's income for new contracts . Dell " sought arbitration to enforce the agreement , claiming that Falk 's ' unilaterally ' had rewritten clients ' third @-@ party contracts to reduce fees to Dell . "

Falk and partners Curtis Polk and Mike Higgins soon propelled FAME to the top of the NBA player representation business . At its peak , the company consisted of about 25 people and represented 45 players . During FAME 's 7 @-@ year existence , it represented " an unprecedented 6 first @-@ round draft picks in the NBA , negotiated over \$ 400 million in contracts for its free @-@ agent clients , and negotiated four of the five largest contracts in team sports history . " Just prior to the company 's sale in 1998 , the contracts of Falk 's players totaled almost \$ 800 million .

In 1998 , Falk sold FAME to the entertainment group SFX for \$ 100 million , while remaining the group 's president . In the space of a year , SFX bought 14 private sports representation companies for a combined \$ 1 @. @ 5 billion and consolidated them into SFX Sports Group in 1999 , naming

Falk as Chairman . Ironically , one of the companies SFX acquired was ProServ , and Falk found himself in charge of the company that he had left on such bitter terms .

During his Chairmanship at SFX Sports Group from 1999 to 2001 , " Falk oversaw the acquisition of a dozen sports agencies that enabled SFX to represent approximately 20 percent of MLB and NBA players . " Largely due to the work of Falk and fellow agent Arn Tellem , the umbrella SFX Sports Group represented 78 NBA players in contract negotiations in 2000 , and came to represent approximately one @-@ third of NBA players in 2002 .

= = 1995 and 1998 NBA lockouts = =

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Falk was one of the key figures in the 1995 NBA lockout . The lockout originally occurred when the players wanted a soft salary cap , while the owners wanted a hard salary cap . Falk led a rebellion on the National Basketball Players Association (NBPA) by establishing a dissident faction of 16 players and a number of agents (including players Michael Jordan , Patrick Ewing , Alonzo Mourning , Reggie Miller , and fellow agents Marc Fleisher and Arn Tellem) that began advocating for NBPA decertification . The goal was to strip NBA management of antitrust protection , making the salary cap and other forms of collective bargaining violations of antitrust laws , win a settlement in court , and then immediately re @-@ form the Players ' Union . NBA Commissioner David Stern criticized Falk 's involvement in the negotiations , saying that he was " trashing his own clients . " Kenny Gattison , the Charlotte Hornets ' player representative , went so far as to blame the entire lockout on Falk .

" I think this whole thing has been manufactured by David Falk " , Gattison told The Charlotte Observer Friday night . " The guys he used to initiate the decertification drive aren 't concerned with the union and the everyday little guy . These guys have been in the league 10 or 11 years and have yet to voice an opinion about what 's going on . Then all of a sudden David Falk doesn 't like what 's going on . "

Despite considerable support , decertification was defeated by a vote of the Players ' Union , 226 ? 134 . But even though Falk did not manage to decertify the NBPA , his influence helped to lead to the abandonment of a luxury tax on salaries , and ultimately led to a deal that increased the players ' portion of NBA revenues from 52 % to 57 % , as well as the salary structure that saw Michael Jordan make \$ 33 million for the 1998 season alone . Some argued that the concessions Falk gained from the owners through his role in the 1995 lockout were the primary cause of another lockout that occurred just three seasons later .

= = = 1998 ? 99 NBA lockout = = =

During the 1998 ? 99 lockout , Falk was often described as the " invisible hand " that guided union negotiations . The NBPA President during the lockout , Patrick Ewing , was a client of Falk 's . Falk was also the agent of " nearly half " of the union 's 19 @-@ member negotiating committee , including Alonzo Mourning , Juwan Howard , and Dikembe Mutombo . Though his presence in negotiations was already assumed , Falk publicly stated in an October 31 , 1998 New York Times article that he would " roll up his sleeves and exert as much influence as he (could) behind the scenes , ... (planning) to take a more proactive role in ending the lockout . "

Shortly after his statements in the Times article , Falk and Arn Tellem , who together represented more than 70 of the NBA 's 400 players , organized a charity exhibition game , with part of the proceeds going to financially pinched NBA players . The rosters had a number of Falk clients , and some saw the game as a threat by Falk " to create a new league through a partnership with the entertainment giant SFX , which [had] recently purchased Falk 's company for \$ 150 million . " The game was played on December 19 , 1998 in the Atlantic City Convention Center , featuring 16 All @-@ Stars and drawing a crowd of about 6 @,@ 000 people . Falk and the other organizers had

originally planned to give 90 % of the proceeds to NBA players , but public criticism caused them to instead give almost all of the \$ 1 million to national and local charities .

Meanwhile , Falk was being criticized on multiple fronts for his role in lockout negotiations . NBA Commissioner David Stern accused Falk and Arn Tellem specifically of " holding the deal hostage " to reap benefits for their high @-@ end clients . Fellow player agent Harold MacDonald disparaged what he saw as Falk 's excessive influence on the union 's president , Patrick Ewing :

" Every time I see Patrick say something , it 's almost like watching the Energizer bunny " , said the agent Harold MacDonald , who represents Derrick Coleman and Terry Mills . " I 'm just waiting for Falk to put in another battery , and off Patrick goes again . Hardly any influence ? Give me a break . "

Isiah Thomas , who was President of the Players ' Union from 1988 to 1994 , blasted Falk by saying that " he 's been trying to take over the union for years , " and many saw Falk as the controlling influence in the union 's negotiations . Falk 's involvement in the 1998 lockout also led to Mike Lupica famously dubbing Falk " Rasputin off the bench " in a New York Daily News article , " the rare person who could make a writer root for a sports owner . " The lockout finally ended just 29 hours before the cancellation of the entire NBA season after the players overwhelmingly ratified the latest deal put forward , 179 @-@ 5 .

= = Influence and inspiration = =

= = = Facilitating NBA trades = = =

Falk 's client list , with Michael Jordan its centerpiece , made him one of the primary movers and shakers in the NBA , able to leverage teams into agreeing to his terms on contracts and trades . Some speculated that Falk engineered as many as one of every five NBA trades during the height of his power , and he was often considered the second @-@ most powerful man in basketball behind NBA Commissioner David Stern . In The Sporting News ' list of the " 100 Most Powerful People in Sports " , Falk was listed no lower than # 32 for 10 straight years from 1991 to 2000 , peaking at # 14 from 1998 to 1999 .

" Falk has massive leverage " , says the general manager of one N.B.A. team who didn 't want his name used for fear of angering Falk . " If he just had Michael , he would be considered a marketing genius , which he is . But David represents so many players that he is a major force . He pretty much gets what he asks for . "

A 1999 deal in which Falk forced the Minnesota Timberwolves to trade Stephon Marbury gives a good indication of how Falk used his power . Falk threatened the Timberwolves by telling them that Marbury would walk away in free agency at the end of the season if he was not traded , as well as suggesting that he would dump his stable of free agents into the lap of Chicago Bulls GM Jerry Krause if Marbury was not moved . As the Minnesota Timberwolves started looking around for possible trade scenarios , Falk even went so far as to veto a trade that would have brought Kerry Kittles (another Falk client) to Minnesota for Marbury , claiming that Kittles had no interest in playing for Minnesota . The Timberwolves were eventually forced to send Marbury to New Jersey in a three @-@ team trade . Minnesota 's General Manager , Kevin McHale , was greatly embittered about the trade , and has been quoted as saying that " If a nuclear bomb dropped on earth , two things would survive : roaches and David Falk . "

A second trade which resulted from Falk 's influence was the 2000 mega @-@ deal which moved Knicks All @-@ Star center Patrick Ewing to the Seattle SuperSonics in a four @-@ team trade involving 12 players and 5 draft picks . Falk apparently made threats to the Knicks that he would move Glen Rice to the Miami Heat if they did not consent to trade Ewing , who supposedly wanted out of New York .

Falk was frequently blasted for making use of threats and side @-@ deals to move his clients around and maximize their earnings , but he remained unapologetic , arguing that he was simply looking after the best interests of his clients .

" That 's called leverage " , he said . " Every company in the world uses leverage whenever they engage in any negotiation . It 's bad for the teams and good for the players . I work for the players . "

= = = Building wealth for clients and himself = = =

As early as 1992 , even before his departure from ProServ , other NBA agents had begun acknowledging that Falk generally negotiated the contracts that defined the market for the year , and set the standard by which other agents were judged . By the end of the 1995 NBA lockout , Falk controlled enough top players that he was seen as " dictat (ing) the structure and the economics of the entire league , " so much so that during one six @-@ day period in the summer of 1996 , he negotiated six contracts ? for Jordan , Alonzo Mourning , Juwan Howard , Kenny Anderson , Dikembe Mutombo and Lee Mayberry ? worth more than \$ 335 million . Since Falk usually earned 4 % of player contracts , which is the maximum amount allowed by the Players ' Union , he made roughly \$ 13 million for these 6 deals alone . He was so successful at negotiating contracts that in 1998 , just before he sold FAME to SFX Entertainment , the contracts of Falk 's players totaled just under \$ 800 million .

Falk also earned as much as 20 % of player endorsement deals and off @-@ court income , and with Michael Jordan 's endorsement deals alone soaring to over \$ 40 million annually in the mid @-@ 90s , Falk counted his yearly income in the tens of millions . He also negotiated notable shoe endorsements for James Worthy , Boomer Esiason (the first NFL player to endorse the Reebok Pump) and Allen Iverson . Falk was not well @-@ liked around the league , with even NBA executives acknowledging that they felt he held a disproportionate amount of power . As the negotiator behind four of the five largest contracts in team sports history and the pre @-@ eminent agent in the NBA , Falk was a contributor to the spike in player salaries that saw the average NBA contract rise from \$ 330 @,@ 000 in 1984 , the year Jordan was signed , to \$ 4 @.@ 5 million in 2001 , when he stepped down as Chairman of SFX Sports Group . Falk himself scoffed at the venom that was frequently directed his way :

" There 's always something to criticize -- I have too much power or too many clients . I scoff at that . Think about it : If you lived on a block with \$ 300 @,@ 000 houses and you sold yours for \$ 2 @.@ 5 million , your neighbors would thank you . But in my business they don 't . That used to make me angry . Now I 'm just amused . "

= = = Professional legacy = = =

Falk 's enduring legacy can best be described as the NBA 's new star @-@ centered focus . Falk 's idea was that since most people bought Chicago Bulls tickets to see Michael Jordan , Jordan himself should get a large proportion of the benefit .

" Basketball is a hybrid between an individual and team sport " , Falk is saying . " Very gifted players almost make a team by themselves . In that environment , a Michael Jordan , Alonzo Mourning , Juwan Howard , Shaquille O 'Neal and Patrick Ewing bring in the fans . Fans come to watch them play primarily . They create marketing opportunities , new stadiums , luxury boxes , and they should be paid a disproportionate amount of money . The salary structure should be close to what it is in Hollywood , where Jim Carrey makes \$ 16 million a film and the second star makes \$ 2 million . That 's what I believe as an economics major and as a neo @-@ capitalist . "

As David Halberstam put it in his book *Playing for Keeps : Michael Jordan and the World He Made* ,

Michael Jordan and David Falk helped make each other , and each profited to a remarkable degree from their special collaboration . It is true that Michael Jordan was the person who in the end actually did the deeds , went on the court and hit the final jump shot again and again , but it is also true that David Falk helped revolutionize the process of representing a basketball player , going into a team sport and creating the idea of the individual player as a commercial superstar .

== Personal legacy and philanthropy ==

On April 23 , 2008 , Syracuse University established The David B. Falk Center for Sport Management , an annex to the Carrier Dome , to better prepare graduates to enter the sports industry , and student @-@ athletes to manage realities of professional sports through life @-@ skills training , in its College of Human Ecology . It was supported by a \$ 5 million gift from Falk and his wife Rhonda . The Falk Center 's inaugural event was a panel discussion on issues in contemporary sports at Madison Square Garden in New York City . Falk is chair of the university 's Sport Management Advisory Board .

On June 22 , 2009 , it was announced that Rick Burton was named the David B. Falk Distinguished Professor of Sport Management and will begin his position on August 20 , teaching courses in international sport , sport communications and sport marketing while pursuing scholarly work , research and other academic initiatives in the Department of Sport Management . Burton was the first executive director of the Warsaw Sports Marketing Center at the University of Oregon 's Lundquist College of Business , chief marketing officer for the U.S. Olympic Committee and commissioner of the National Basketball League in Sydney , Australia .

On March 24 , 2011 it was announced that Falk had made a pledge of an additional \$ 15 million to Syracuse University and " The David B. Falk Center for Sports Management " .

In 2014 , Falk and Patrick Ewing announced a \$ 3 @.@ 3 million donation to the John R. Thompson , Jr . Intercollegiate Athletics Center under construction at Georgetown University . The amount is a reference to Ewing 's number , 33 .

On Oct. 23 , 2015 , the Dean of the David B. Falk College of Sport and Human Dynamics , Diane Lyden Murphy , will lead a dedication ceremony to commemorate the opening of the new home of the college . For the first time in the college 's history , which dates back to 1917 when the School of Home Economics began as a course in the College of Agriculture and the first nutrition course was taught , Falk College 's academic disciplines and administrative offices are housed in a central location .

== Other ventures ==

Falk is also on the board of directors of Sapphire Brands ; a founding investor in private aviation company , Marquis Jet and Golf GCX Partners ; and a founder and principal in Relevad Media Group , a digital alternative advertising company . Falk is a frequent guest lecturer at universities across the country , including Harvard , Yale , and Duke , and serves on the George Washington University National Law Center 's advisory board .

" My mother was a teacher , and I think that 's one reason that , amidst my deal @-@ making skills , I have a very strong pedagogical bent " , he says . " I really enjoy teaching , and believe it is one of the most important professions in our society . "

== Executive Producer ==

Falk executive produced a number of sports @-@ related films , including Space Jam , which teamed Jordan with a number of Looney Tunes characters , Michael Jordan to the Max , the critically acclaimed large @-@ format feature , and the Sports Emmy Award @-@ winning On Hallowed Ground , a documentary on the history of the Rucker Park Basketball League .

== The Bald Truth ==

Falk 's first book , The Bald Truth , was released on February 3 , 2009 .

== Partial client list ==

Falk 's 2014 NBA player clients are in bold , while his non @-@ NBA player clients are in italics .

