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01 *GRASSROOTS*

GROWING UP ON THE STREET COURTS OF CHICAGO, WHERE BASKETBALL IS KING, YOU WERE GROOMED FROM THE START TO KNOW BASKETBALL. YOU HAD TO EAT, BREATHE AND SLEEP BASKETBALL. MAYBE MORE IMPORTANTLY, YOU HAD TO HAVE THE LOOK OF A BASKETBALL PLAYER. BACK THEN, IT WAS MORE ABOUT THE STATURE OF THE PLAYER; TALL (OR SHORT BUT LOOK FAST), SLENDER, ATHLETIC BUILD, THE WALK BUT STILL ABOUT THE BRANDS YOU WORE. THE NAMES BENJI WILSON AND COCHISE ("COOLEY HIGH") COME INTO MIND. THERE WERE STILL LINES FOR SHOES ON A SATURDAY MORNING, THOUGH FOR A DIFFERENT CULTURE AND YOU LACED YOUR KICKS UP HOURS LATER IN YOUR BASKETBALL GAME AT THE LOCAL REC CENTER, SCHOOL GROUND OR YMCA. THE BASKETBALL PLAYER WASN'T THE CONSUMER OF THE LATEST SNEAKERS TO STORE AWAY.

SEE BACK THEN, MY PARENTS BOUGHT ME SHOES FOR COMFORT FIRST THEN STYLE. THAT IS BECAUSE I WOULD BE GOING TO BATTLE IN THESE KICKS. I WOULD BE LACING UP WITH MY TEAMMATES TO GO TO WAR ON THE COURT. AND MY SNEAKERS WERE MY WEAPONS. OF COURSE I WOULD OBLIGE TO THE LATEST TREND AND STYLE SO THAT I WAS FRESH WHILE DOING IT. MAYBE IF I WAS LUCKY, I COULD CONVINCE MY MOTHER TO BUY ME TWO PAIR: ONE TO HOOP IN AND ONE TO WEAR TO SCHOOL.

LET'S FAST FORWARD. TAKE A TRIP TO A NIKETOWN ACROSS AMERICA ON A SATURDAY OF A SNEAKER RELEASE. WHO DO YOU SEE IN LINE? YOU SEE GROUPS AND GROUPS OF FRIENDS. TOTING COATS AND CHAIRS. SNACKS FOR THE WAIT. BUT WHAT YOU SEE LESS OF ARE THE ATHLETES. THE BASKETBALL PLAYERS I SPOKE OF BEFORE. THE ATHLETES OF MY GENERATION WHO DID NOT SEE THIS AS A FAD OR A PHASE OR A TREND. YOU SEE THIS NEW DEMOGRAPHIC OF SNEAKERHEADS: THE COMMON CONNOISSEUR OF SNEAKERS.

WHY? IS THIS BECAUSE THERE ARE NO MORE TRUE YOUNG ATHLETES?

THAT CAN'T BE TRUE. WHAT ABOUT JABARI PARKER? I BET HE STILL WANTS TO ROCK THE LATEST, FLYEST KICKS LIKE I DID WHEN I WAS COMING UP. SO WHAT HAS CHANGED? WHAT IS THE NEW FOCUS? WHAT IS THE NEW STRATEGY OF BASKETBALL SHOES?

LET'S START WITH CHANGING THE STORY OF MY UPBRINGING WITHIN THE BASKETBALL GAME OF CHICAGO. GRASSROOTS. IN THE 90S, THE PERCEPTION TOWARDS GRASSROOT INFLUENCE/FOCUS WAS SLIM. PRIORITY TO THIS TARGET FOCUS WAS UNCHARTED IN THE DEPTHS COMPARED TO TODAY. YES, IT MADE SINCE THAT THE BEST YOUNG ATHLETES WANTED TO WEAR THE LATEST GEAR BUT NOWHERE NEAR THE GROWTH, MARKET AND OPPORTUNITY IN TODAY'S FOCUS. WHEN I PLAYED AAU BASKETBALL IN THE 90S, THERE WAS ONE TOURNAMENT PLAYED MAYBE EVERY OTHER WEEKEND, ACTUAL DAYS OF SATURDAY AND SUNDAY.



THE PRESTIGIOUS CAMPS SEEMED IMPOSSIBLE TO BREAK INTO IF YOU DIDN'T KNOW SOMEBODY WHO KNOW SOMEBODY WITH ENOUGH JUICE TO HAVE SOMEBODY ELSE COME WATCH YOU PLAY FIRST. THERE WAS TRAVEL THOUGH MINIMUM AND PLAYER'S PARENTS HAD TO DO FUNDRAISERS FOR THEIR UNIFORMS AND KICKS. THE FIRST PAIR OF TEAM SHOES I PLAYED IN WERE AIR FORCE ONES. WE HAD TO COME UP WITH A CERTAIN AMOUNT BEFORE THE SUMMER STARTED TO GET THE ORDERS. AND TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION THAT I WAS A PART OF ONE OF THE BETTER AAU ORGS. IN THE CITY OF CHICAGO!

TODAY, SINCE THE MARKET HAS ELABORATED, AAU TEAMS/CLUB TEAMS/ORGANIZED TEAMS ARE SPONSORED BY THE MAJOR BRANDS. APPARENT ATTRIBUTION OF THE GRASSROOTS INFLUENCE. MAJOR BRANDS ARE HAVING SUCH AN EARLY INFLUENCE ON ATHLETES DUE TO THEIR PRESENCE WITHIN ORGANIZATIONS AND HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAMS. THIS MARKET IS BIG! THE YOUNG ATHLETES ARE GETTING FASTER, STRONGER, BETTER...SOONER. THE YOUNG ATHLETES ARE DRAWING MUCH MORE ATTENTION ON MAJOR PLATFORMS SUCH AS ESPN AND YOUTUBE. PEOPLE ARE INTERESTED MORE THAN EVER OF WHO IS "THE NEXT".

AS A YOUNG ATHLETE MYSELF, I WASN'T AWARE OF THE PRESENCE THE BRANDS HAD ON MY INFLUENCE. TODAY, IT IS CLEARER. THE KIDS KNOW! THEY HAVE AN ABUNDANCE OF OPTIONS. AND WITH OPTIONS COMES A SELECTION. EVERY BRAND WANTS TO GENERATE MOMENTUM FOR WHEN IT'S TIME FOR THAT SELECTION, TO SOLIDIFY THEIR POSITION. THE DIFFERENCE PLAINLY PUT: THEN, I WENT WHERE I COULD PLAY WHILE; NOW, YOUNG ATHLETES GO WHERE THEY HAVE BEEN INFLUENCED THE MOST, MANY TIMES LEAD BY A PARTICULAR BRAND.



02 *THE EMERGING HYBRID PLAYER*

A SUCCESSFUL BASKETBALL PLAYER'S GAME = 90% MENTAL + 10% PHYSICAL. THIS WAS A COMMON EQUATION USED BY BASKETBALL COACHES ALL ACROSS THE COUNTRY. THIS EQUATION OVER THE YEARS HAS RAPIDLY CHANGED. WITH NEW INFLUENCES INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO BRAND PRESENCE, SOCIAL MEDIA, OTHER MEDIA-STREAMING OUTLETS AND THE SPEED AT WHICH INFORMATION TRAVELS, THE EQUATION HAS CHANGED. THE EQUATION NOW MAY READ: 85% MENTAL + 10% MARKETABILITY + 5% PHYSICAL. AND WITH THE CHANGE, INTRODUCES OPPORTUNITY.

UNDERSTAND, THIS IS NOTHING NEW...MARKETABILITY. WHAT'S CHANGED IS THAT TODAY, A PLAYER'S MARKETABILITY IS SOUGHT OUT FIRST MORE TIMES THAN NOT BEFORE A PLAYER'S TRUE TALENT & ABILITY.

MARKETABILITY IS INTRODUCED THROUGH THE PLAYERS' IMAGE, STORY-TELLING ABILITY, TAGLINES, COMPARISONS, NICKNAMES AND PLATFORM (BACKGROUND/GRASSROOTS). HOW CAN THIS ATHLETE LEAD THE NEW CHARGE OF NEW INNOVATION INTO THE NEW GENERATION? MARKETABILITY THRIVES FROM WHERE THE ATHLETE IS FROM. DOES THE ATHLETE HOLD TRUE TO A CERTAIN MARKET'S DESCRIPTION? EX. IS HE A "CHICAGO KID" OR "EAST COAST KID" OR "WEST COAST KID"? MARKETABILITY IS INTRODUCED THROUGH OTHER GEOMETRICS ALSO.

IN THE INSTANCE OF BEN SIMMONS: A SUPERB YOUNG BASKETBALL ATHLETE FROM AUSTRALIA WITH AMERICAN ROOTS WHO WENT AGAINST THE GRAIN TWICE TO THE LEVEL HE IS NOW. HE HORNED HIS GAME FROM DOWN UNDER THEN TO A PREP/BOARDING SCHOOL IN FLORIDA. FROM FLORIDA TO SKIPPING THE TOP PROGRAMS SUCH AS KENTUCKY TO LANDING AT LSU. VERY UNTRADITIONAL. YET VERY MARKETABLE AND ATTRACTIVE TO THE CONSUMER. THIS IS THE NEW HYBRID PLAYER!



03 *BRANDING*

IN KNOWING THIS NEW DYNAMIC, DOES IT AUTOMATICALLY EQUATE TO PROFIT FOR NIKE BASKETBALL? THAT IS NOT TRUE. AS BASKETBALL'S GRASSROOTS EXPAND, SO DOES THE NIKE BRAND. YES, NIKE IS THE GLOBAL LEADER OF SPORTS BUT DID THAT GUARD PLAYING IN THE NBL IN AUSTRALIA THAT BEN SIMMONS WAS WATCHING AS A YOUTH IN LIVE ACTION WEARING NIKES? OR WAS HE SPONSORED BY A LOCAL BRAND? DID THAT LOCAL BRAND CAPTURE THAT MARKET UNMISTAKABLY DUE TO A LACK OF INTENSE GLOBAL FOCUS FROM NIKE EARLY IN THE GRASSROOTS DEPARTMENT? GROWING UP IN CHICAGO, I WANTED TO BE LIKE MIKE. AND I ALSO SAW MJ LIVE IN-PERSON AND ON TV, NIGHT AFTER NIGHT. WHO WAS BEN SIMMONS WATCHING LIVE AT HIS LOCAL AUSTRALIAN HOMETOWN ARENA? WHAT COMMERCIAL, PRINT AND BILLBOARD CAMPAIGNS WERE MORE VISIBLE? BETTER YET, LOOK AT THE STUDY OF THE CHINESE BASKETBALL BOOM WHEN YAO MING TOOK ON THE NBA. HOW FAMILIAR IS NIKE TO THE YOUNG ATHLETE IN AUSTRALIA AND LITHUANIA AND FRANCE?

IT IS TO BE SAID THAT BRANDING HAS CHANGED WITHIN THE GAME OF BASKETBALL, LOCALLY AND GLOBALLY. THERE ARE DIFFERENT INFLUENCES, WHICH GENERATES ACTIONS NOT COMMON TO THE MARKET WE'VE KNOWN. THERE'S MORE EMPHASIS ON THE DIFFERENCES IN THE GAME ITSELF SUCH AS ANALYTICS AND STYLE. IT'S NOT ONLY AN EAST COAST TYPE OF PLAYER COMPARED TO A MIDWEST COMPARED TO A WEST COAST. BUT THERE ARE DIFFERENT INFLUENCES FROM EUROPE, ASIA AND AFRICA. THERE'S THE INFLUENCE TO TELL A STORY TO AN AUDIENCE TO REALLY THRIVE OFF THE GAME'S ENTERTAINMENT VALUE. THE MASS AUDIENCE OF BASKETBALL CONSUMERS AND FANS ALIKE JUST DO NOT WANT TO BE LIKE MIKE ANYMORE. THEY WANT TO KNOW WHO'S ON HIS TIDAL PLAYLIST AND WHOM HE FOLLOWS ON INSTAGRAM AND TWITTER.

GRASSROOTS IS AS IMPORTANT AS SPONSORING THE TOP ATHLETE ALREADY ESTABLISHED IN THE LEAGUE. LIFESTYLE BRANDING AND INCORPORATION HAS ALSO GAIN SIGNIFICANCE. INVEST EFFORTS AND RESOURCES INTO THESE FOCUSES AND CAMPAIGNS. *THE ATHLETE WITH THE BEST STORY OR TRIUMPH NOW IS BETTER THAN THE MOST TALENTED ATHLETE AVAILABLE.*

