



ISSUE 1 - HOLIDAY EDITION

LEAD

Journal

A small, stylized icon of a basketball hoop and net, positioned between the words "LEAD" and "Journal".



2025 NBA CUP

CHAMPIONS



EDITOR'S NOTE

Congratulations Champs!!

Welcome to the first issue of **LEAD** this season. I want to start by wishing you and your families health, peace, and continued blessings as we celebrate the holidays.

What you just accomplished in Las Vegas speaks for itself.

Winning the NBA Cup on that stage, in that moment, was heard and felt far beyond the arena. It uplifted this organization. It energized the city. And it reminded everyone watching exactly what New York basketball looks like when it's at its best.

You showed grit and composure. And what this city stands for.

You came from behind and met the moment. And you dominated when it mattered most.

You **found a way to win.**

That phrase matters.

As our captain and MVP Jalen Brunson said afterward, we always **find a way to win.**

What stood out even more was how he said it. He immediately credited the entire team. No one did this alone.

That kind of language, that kind of leadership reflects who this group is becoming, and it sets a standard for where we're headed.

Speaking of language, this season's LEAD Journal is built around the idea that words matter. Preparation, systems and people matter for sure – but the language they speak is what really makes it all work.

That said – in this issue you'll hear voices from across the organization, coaches, performance staff, medical, training, nutrition, security, and more.

And you'll hear from our G League group as well, because this is one system, one culture, one standard.

This journal is for you and celebrates you for all you do!

But none of this happens without the team behind the team.

So we also recognize our coaching staff, our performance, player development, player enrichment, medical, training, nutrition, equipment, security, video, administrative, operations, travel, IT, Kitchen and maintenance staff -and everyone who shows up every day to support the work.

We are a family. And championships are always built together.

New York is excited about the future. We are proud of what's been done. And we're clear about how we move forward.

Find a way, every day!

Go Knicks!!!

"SUITES " (a.k.a Derek H. Suite, M.D.)



ABOUT THIS JOURNAL

LEAD is an internal , independent, development journal created for players and staff within the organization. It is intended to support learning, reflection, and conversation around performance, preparation, recovery, and professionalism across a long season.

The perspectives shared in LEAD reflect general principles, lived experience, and performance-oriented insights. They are not intended as individualized medical, psychological, nutritional, or training advice, nor should they replace direct guidance from team physicians, athletic trainers, performance staff, or other licensed professionals.

Players are encouraged to consult directly with the appropriate team staff regarding their own health, training, recovery, and performance decisions.

LEAD is an independent, private and confidential internal publication. It is not intended for public distribution, external sharing, or use outside the organization.

LEAD is designed to complement, not replace, the systems and professionals already in place to support performance and well-being.

LEAD JOURNAL

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If you've been around winning teams long enough, you start to notice something. They don't just play the same way. And they don't just prepare the same way.

They talk the same way.

Not loud or rehearsed...just consistent.

Walk through this locker room, and the words are already there. On the wall. In the air. In how guys talk to each other during practice. And how leaders speak when things aren't going well.

“Communication. Mindfulness. Accountability. A Competitive Spirit. JOY.”

You see them every day. Easy to walk past them without thinking much about it. But they don't stop working just because you stop looking.

Those words matter because language is usually the first thing that slips when pressure hits. Miss a shot. Give up a run and the crowd goes nuts! In hard games, legs can get heavy and the mind starts drifting. That's when the wrong words show up. Doubt. Frustration. Distractions. Noise.

But the right words will bring you back.

That's why **find a way** landed the way it did.

When Jalen said it after the Cup win, it didn't sound like a quote but something this group already lives by. No excuses, drama, or pointing fingers. Just a simple statement about how this team handles moments like that.



“Teams run on language long before they run plays.”

We always **find a way**.

That phrase doesn't promise anything. It doesn't make the game easier. It just keeps everyone tied to effort when control disappears.

And that's what good language does. It narrows things and keeps the group connected. The right words give you something solid to come back to when everything else is moving fast.

You can see it in how this team competes.

There's **communication** even when plays break down. And **mindfulness** when emotions start climbing. **Accountability** when something needs to be said. A **competitive edge** that refuses to back down when things get uncomfortable. And joy, even in the grind, because joy is how you stay loose enough to keep fighting.

None of that happens by accident.

Teams run on language long before they run plays. Words get repeated. Tone gets set. Over time, it turns into instinct. You stop thinking about it, and you just act.

That's why this journal is spending time on words this season.

Because when the game gets chaotic, the words you carry are often the last thing you still control.

Find a way.

Not someday, not perfectly, but by sticking together... and always working together.

That's how success sounds in this house.

And if you listen closely, you'll hear it said a little differently by every player in it.

Execution Over Emotion

by "Suites"



"Find a way."

When Jalen said it, it just made so much sense. Finding a way means you stop negotiating with the moment.

You don't argue with the whistle. You don't keep reliving a missed shot. And you don't wait for things to go better to feel better. You just execute.

Find a way works because it cuts through emotion and brings you back to function.

Language decides who survives pressure. That's why this journal keeps coming back to words for a reason. The words you tell yourself under stress become the marching orders.

Some language sharpens you. Some language weakens you.

There is no neutral.

If emotion starts narrating the game, you're no longer dangerous. If your language stays focused, you stay in control.

That's what running the system really is: Emotional dominance, not emotional suppression.

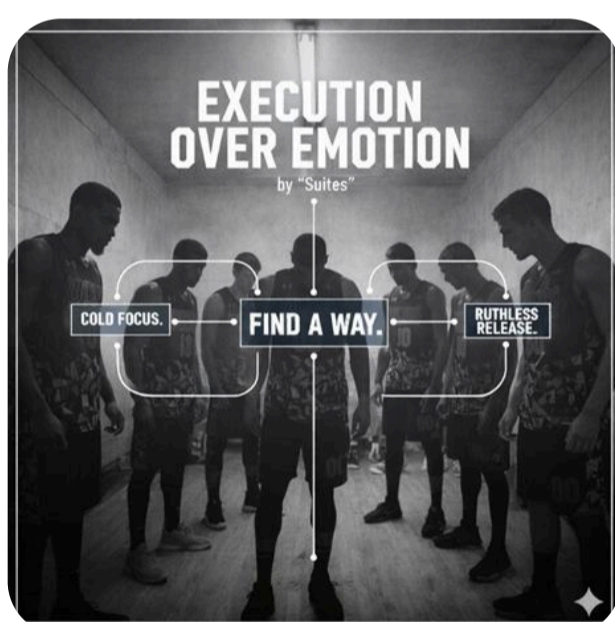
This is where your savage focus comes in.

Savage doesn't mean reckless. Savage means you **let go** immediately with no residue, baggage or carryover.

No attachment. Missed shot? Gone. Bad call? Gone. Momentum swing? Gone.

Assassins don't react. They execute.

Cold focus. Clean decisions. Ruthless release of whatever just happened. That's next-play mentality at its highest level--what elite **mental performance work** gives you.



**"Under pressure,
you don't rise.
You default."**

It's your system inside the system.

The team has a system. You also need one that belongs to you.

You need to know exactly how you **reset when your body tightens** and how you **refocus when your mind drifts** and let go of errors before they poison the next possession.

If you don't have that, the game will run you. And you already know the game shows no mercy. Your foundations will decide how savage you will be.

A system doesn't start at tip-off. It starts the night before. Sleep. Recovery. Hydration. Fuel. These are the keys.

This is beyond lifestyle. We are talking structure.

Build on solid ground and pressure has nothing to shake. Build on sand and everything feels shaky and urgent.

Preparation is your insurance policy. Consistency is your superpower. That's quiet dominance. Talents must be used. Everyone has been given something.

What separates pros is whether you use it or hide it. Fear buries talent. Discipline multiplies it. Savage execution requires courage.

People like to say you rise to the level of your training.

Under pressure, you don't rise. You default.

You default to your language. And to your system. If you don't have one, the moment will own you.

Pressure will come.

Be savage enough to let it pass. Be cold enough to execute.

That's how you **find a way**.

Derek H. Suite, M.D (a.k.a "Suites") is a peak performance consultant who specializes in sleep, focus, and mental performance coaching strategies for elite athletes and top performing artists.



Precision Under Pressure Execution habits when the game gets tight.

Staff Writer

Sleep

Fatigue can show up in your judgment before it shows up in your legs.

Edge move: Protect your shutdown routine like it's treatment. Same order. Same cues. When sleep runs short, rhythm protects decision-making. Reliable sleep habits can preserve reaction time and composure.

Focus

Pressure narrows the window for error.

Edge move: Deliberately narrow your field of attention. One read. One assignment. One action. Everything else is filtered out. Focus is selective discipline.

Breathing

Breathing is the fastest way to regain control.

Edge move: Extend the exhale slightly longer than the inhale. Heart rate settles. Vision stabilizes. Hands quiet. Control the breath. Control the response.

Reframe

Interpretation drives reaction.

Edge move: Strip meaning away. Ask one question only: What's required right now? Answer it. Act.

Recover

Unreleased tension carries forward.

Edge move: Between plays, physically release tension. Drop the shoulders. Reset posture. Stay available.

Reset

Each possession demands fresh attention.

Edge move: Use a consistent cue. Visual. Physical. Mental. Then engage without delay.

3 R's

Reframe. Recover. Reset.

This in game mental sequence keeps attention on task and prevents emotion from driving decisions. You process efficiently and return to execution-ready focus. See Suites for more info on any of the above



“Control the breath. Control the response”

READY TO PLAY

Discipline: The Under-the-Hood Secret of Pro Swag

Coach's Take — by Coach Rick Brunson



Alright, let's stop running from the word discipline. Forget the textbook definition. I'm not talking about boring rules or the stuff someone has to make you do. I'm talking about pro-level control, the kind that separates the legends from the guys who just clock in.

Discipline is one of the most misunderstood words in the game. People think it limits you. It doesn't. It unlocks you. It's self-mastery. It's choosing to get the work in when nobody's watching. Choosing to run that tape back one more time instead of scrolling. That's the real grind.

The secret is simple. Discipline is choosing your future self over your current comfort. It's the quiet work that builds real confidence. The kind you don't have to talk about. The kind that shows up when the lights are bright.

I see discipline as the ultimate cheat code. You build such a deep bag, footwork, conditioning, attention to detail, that your mind is free. That's when creativity shows up and when the game starts to feel easy. The most disciplined players are the ones who can improvise without panic.

People only notice the highlights. They don't see the hours, the repetition, or the choices that get made every day.

Lock in your discipline. Let the results speak.

Here is one of my favorite quotes:

"Discipline is choosing what you want most over what you want now."

— Kobe Bryant

🔥 The 7-Day Discipline Challenge

For the next seven days, pick one area of your game. Stretching. Free throws. Film. Recovery.

Lock it in every day. No excuses. Don't chase perfection. Chase consistency.

If you do this right, you'll feel it. Not just physically, but mentally.

Do it right, and I guarantee you that you will have that quiet confidence and killer instinct that show up when the ball goes up.

Let's get to work!!

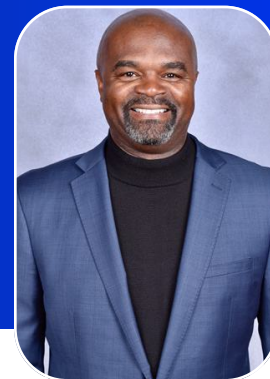


**"Discipline is
the ultimate
cheat code."**

DEFENSIVE INTELLIGENCE

The Power of Observation

by Roderick Williams, Director of Team Security & Logistics



On the court, your survival depends on awareness. You keep your head on a swivel, reading the floor, anticipating where the pressure is coming from, and trusting your instincts.

That same skill — the ability to sense danger, opportunity, and movement before it happens — is just as important off the court.

As we move into the holiday season, carry that same court awareness into your daily life. Just as you feel a defender closing in on a fast break or thread a pocket pass through traffic, stay alert when you're out with your family, traveling, or running errands. Pay attention to what's around you — exits, crowds, vehicles, people's behavior. Observation and preparation aren't paranoia; they're protection.



"Stay ready, so that you don't need to get ready."

You already listen to your body for signs of fatigue, injury, or performance. Apply that same discipline to your instincts. **When something feels off, it usually is. Trust that sixth sense, take action, and stay one step ahead.**

Whether on the hardwood or in the real world, your greatest defensive skill will always be situational awareness.

"Stay ready, so that you don't need to get ready."

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THE ENGINE ROOM

Built for the Long Season

A Word from the Performance Staff



The NBA season doesn't break players in a single moment. Wear and tear builds quietly over time. Fatigue accumulates before it becomes obvious.

Sustained performance depends on recognizing patterns early and responding before they turn into problems.

Remember that Recovery is an active process.



“Strong late always beats fast early.”

Players who manage recovery consistently are more likely to maintain stable performance, reduce preventable injury risk, and contribute effectively when games carry greater consequences.

Recovery is a prerequisite for reliable performance across the season.

Strong late always beats fast early.

THE MEDICAL ADVANTAGE

If Something Feels Off

by Daphne Scott, M.D., Lead Team Physician



During the winter months, symptoms can start small. A scratchy throat. A little congestion. Feeling more tired than usual. Most of the time, it's nothing major, but those early signs are also the easiest to deal with when they're caught early.

If something feels off, I want you to know it's always okay to come talk to me sooner rather than later. Early check-ins aren't about overreacting. They're about keeping things simple and supporting you before something starts to interfere with your sleep, your energy, or your routine.

You're not expected to figure out what symptoms mean on your own or push through something you're unsure about. That's what I'm here for. Bringing things up early usually makes it easier to stay consistent, especially during heavy travel stretches and long weeks.



**"Taking care of the small stuff
is one of the best ways to
take care of yourself."**

I also know real life doesn't pause during the season. Kids get sick. Family members bring things home. That's normal. Staying aware and speaking up early just helps us limit how much that spills into your day-to-day.

If you're ever on the fence, come see me. A quick conversation early almost always makes things easier.

Taking care of the small stuff is one of the best ways to take care of yourself over the long season.

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The Team Behind the Team: Why Attitude Wins Before the Tip-Off

Staff Writer



At the Knicks Christmas party, LEAD caught up with **Head Athletic Trainer Anthony Goenaga** — known around here as the "HAT."

Earlier that week, we had overheard him talking about what he calls "the team behind the team." So we asked him to explain.

His answer had nothing to do with tape jobs, treatment tables, or rehab protocols. It had everything to do with attitude.

"As part of the performance team," Anthony said, "our attitude toward our jobs directly impacts how the players perform on the court."



"This is bigger than us. We represent an organization that represents a city."

That might sound obvious. It's not.

Players don't walk into the training room on their best days. They can come in sore, frustrated and tight. Sometimes mentally worn down by the grind before the body even speaks.

"Our job," Anthony explained, "is to bring a positive perspective into what is already a negative moment for them."

That perspective matters more than most people realize.

The way pain is framed. The tone used in the room. The energy a staff member carries on a long, exhausting day.

All of it transfers.

"The way we think implements itself into the way they think," he said. "If we bring encouragement and the right spirit, it shows up in how they compete."

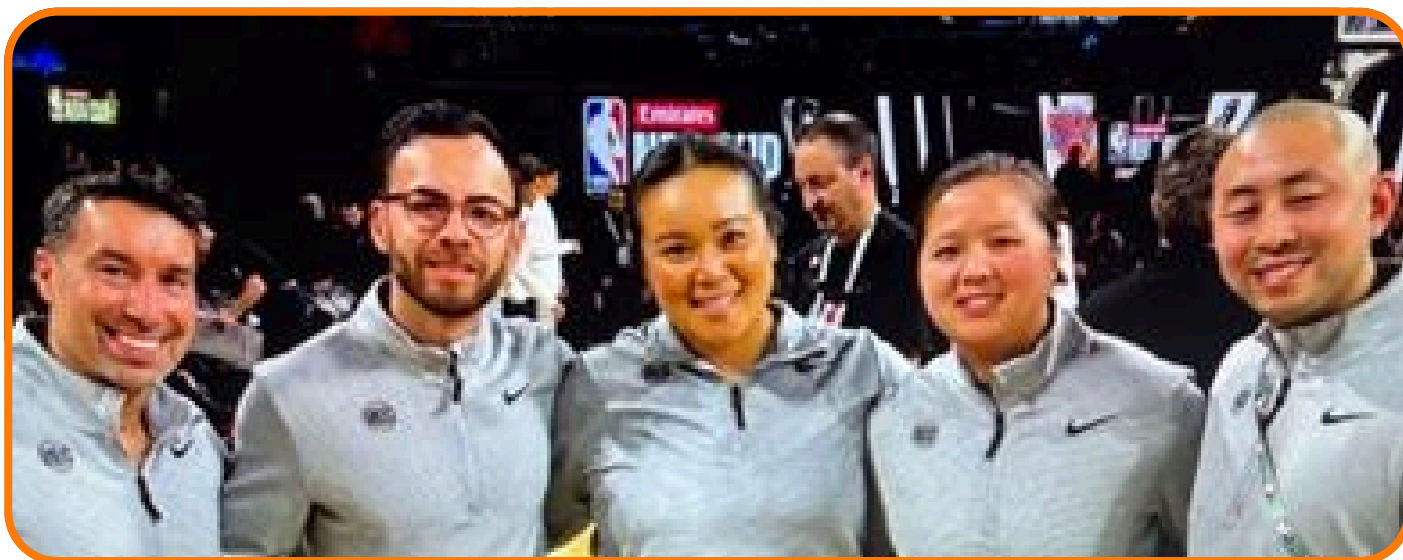
What stood out wasn't forced optimism. It was responsibility.

Anthony talked about fatigue openly. The long nights, the travel, and the he demands that come with the job. But he also talked about knowing when to put that aside.

"This is bigger than us," he said. "We represent an organization that represents a city."

That mindset shapes culture.

When asked why the team has been winning, Anthony didn't point to tactics or talent. He pointed to familiarity and care.



A group that's been together long enough to understand each other. People who know what makes the next person tick. A genuine investment in one another, on and off the court.

That kind of environment doesn't happen by accident. It's built daily in quiet moments most fans never see.

As Head Athletic Trainer, Anthony sees his role as more than physical care.

"Sometimes it's helping an injury. Sometimes it's listening. Sometimes it's easing tension or helping people communicate through conflict," he said. "All of that contributes to winning."

When we asked what message, he would give any player coming into the Knicks organization, the HAT kept it simple:

"Bring your best. Have a positive attitude. Some nights it'll be your night. Some nights it'll be someone else's. Support each other."

That's not just advice for players.

It's the standard for the team behind the team.

FEED THE GRIT

Fueling Consistency Through the Grind #Knicktrition

By Erika Whitman, Director of Sports Nutrition
Lauren Duffy, Team Nutritionist



Erika



Lauren



The middle of the season is where habits get tested. Travel stacks up. Late nights blur into early mornings. Appetite changes. Convenience starts winning small battles. We see it every year.

That's when fueling matters most.

We're not looking for perfection. We're looking for consistency. Nutrition during this stretch is about giving your body enough, often enough, to support energy, recovery, and focus when the schedule doesn't give you much margin.

Skipping meals, under-fueling, or relying on quick fixes doesn't always show up right away. What we usually see first is subtle. Sometimes, energy dips, or sleep gets lighter and recovery begins to take longer. Your focus can also slip. Over weeks, those small misses add up.

Winter adds another layer. Travel, close contact, and long indoor stretches put more stress on the system. Consistent intake of calories, protein, fluids, and micronutrients supports immune function and helps your body handle the grind more smoothly. When intake drops, susceptibility quietly rises.

There are just a few basics that carry the most weight during this part of the season:

- **Regular meals, even when appetite is low**
- **Protein spread across the day, not saved for one sitting**
- **Hydration, especially around flights and game days**
- **Carbohydrates to support workload, not avoid it**
- **Simple, familiar foods during heavy travel stretches**

Consistency beats novelty. Mid-season is not the time to experiment. The goal is to give your body what it expects so it can do its job without distraction.



"Grit shows up in the habits you repeat every day."

And we also want to acknowledge something that's very NBA-specific.

Late nights are part of this league. We know that games end late and adrenaline stays high. Treatment, media, and travel push meals later than most other athletes ever deal with. Sometimes your appetite doesn't match what your body just did.

But sometimes skipping post-game fueling or waiting until the next day can quietly compound fatigue over time. Consistency matters more than timing. Supporting recovery, even when meals happen late, helps stabilize your energy, sleep quality, and readiness across long travel stretches.

Fueling well doesn't guarantee anything. What it does is remove an unnecessary variable. When the body is supported, energy is steadier, recovery is smoother, and late-season performance is easier to access.

Please remember we're always here as a resource. If something isn't sitting right, if travel weeks are throwing you off, or if appetite feels off, let us know. Small adjustments early tend to make a long season feel a lot more manageable.

Remember the nutrition habit you repeat every day can strengthen your body and your grit.

NEXT UP - THE "G"

Power of Words Workshop

Same Language. Same Standard.



Our G League spent time together with Suites and Allan this season talking about identity, language, and how to stay grounded while chasing opportunity.

Out of those conversations came a shared decision to each choose a word that reflects who they are, how they want to show up, and what they want to be reminded of when the work gets heavy.

Those words will live in the locker room, placed inside each player's locker, not as decoration but as anchors. Quiet reminders of purpose, direction, and belonging.

It was about unity. Same organization. Same standards. Same language of growth.

Different paths, shared commitment.

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Vinicius da Silva — Trust

Trust In performance environments, trust means committing fully to decisions shaped by preparation. It shows up as clarity in action, reduced hesitation, and confidence that training will hold when the moment demands speed and precision.



Ibrahima Diallo — Belief

Belief is conviction grounded in work. It reflects confidence in one's readiness, resilience after mistakes, and the expectation that effort and discipline will translate under pressure.



Nicholas Jourdain — Consistency

Consistency is dependable behavior across varying conditions. It is the ability to deliver steady effort, professionalism, and focus regardless of role, setting, or circumstance.



Kevin McCullar Jr. — Joy

Joy, in a performance context, is sustained engagement with the process. It fuels energy, adaptability, and long-term motivation independent of outcomes or external validation.



Toby Okani — Surrender

Surrender is the release of attachment to outcomes while maintaining full commitment to effort. It allows attention to stay on execution rather than noise, enabling clearer decision-making in real time.



**"Different paths,
shared commitment."**



Obadiah Noel — Faith

Faith is commitment in the absence of certainty. It supports patience, perspective, and steady action when progress is gradual and results are not immediately visible.



Dink Pate — God

God represents alignment with purpose beyond performance. This grounding can strengthen composure, accountability, and perspective when navigating pressure and noteworthy moments.



Isaiah Roby — Belief

Belief also reflects confidence in one's ability to adjust. It is trust in response — staying composed, adapting quickly, and continuing to execute after adversity.



Bryson Warren — Patience

Patience is disciplined restraint paired with consistent effort. It allows development to unfold naturally while protecting focus, confidence, and decision quality.



Donovan Williams — Discipline

Discipline is the structure that supports repeatable performance. It is the daily commitment to habits, routines, and standards that sustain readiness over time.



Pacôme Dadiet — Humility

Humility is accurate self-awareness without diminishment. It allows learning to continue, feedback to land, and growth to remain possible regardless of role or recognition.

The Development Diaries

by Kaayla Coulibaly Director, Player Programs & Enrichment



In my world as Director of Player Programs & Enrichment, player development can mean many things. As I wear many hats to fulfill my role, this is one part of the job that I love.

Looking in from the outside, many understand the term "player development" as developing a basketball players skills and talents. But for me, development allows me to help grow our players brands while providing them necessary life skills that reach beyond the court.

When I first started this role, I knew nearly nothing about what this job was or the impact that it would have on me and players.

Fast forward twelve NBA seasons, this has become my career and I'm proud of the work I've done with helping players develop talents, interests, passions and hobbies outside of basketball.

Some people may ask, what does that even mean?

Player development in my world means, helping a player go back to school and finishing earning their college degree. Finding a player a financial advisor to help them understand and manage their money. Connecting a player with real estate agents to learn the world of flipping houses. Interested in the stock market or tech? I can help them with that too. Creating a 501c-3 to start a foundation to give back to their hometown community and give young children an opportunity to experience things they may or may not have be given themselves.



I do it all!

Working in the PD (player development) space, also means providing wellness checks for our guys and making sure that life off the court is under control. New relationships, marriage, babies, living with family, housing, setting up local bank accounts are all things I help our players get a grasp on.

The main thing is helping them keep a balance while still being able to perform at the highest level on the court. Keep reading to see what we are currently doing.

Our Knicks Season of Giving has officially kicked off and will run through Christmas Day. During this is the time of year, our players activate all types of community outreach around the city, spreading joy through gift giving, and other acts of kindness to lift spirits. Last weekend Jordan Clarkson, his foundation; The JC Cares Foundation, in partnership with Garden of Dreams, fed and handed out over 100 turkeys and meals to underserved families in Harlem.

We have a Jr. Knicks clinic scheduled to deliver free shoes to middle school students. There is also a special surprise gift delivery to several families from our Captain, Jalen coming up.

These are just small snapshots of some of the events we do with our players throughout the season.

I enjoy the impact I'm able to have on young men all while being around my favorite sport of basketball!

Happy Holidays...

Player Spotlight

The Words that Move Me

By Suites and Allan Houston



We asked each player to choose a word. One that speaks to who they are, how they compete, and what they come back to when the noise gets loud.

What came back was a language.

It starts with **Believe**. The decision to act before certainty arrives. That belief is held steady by **Faith**, the unseen force that carries you through the most challenging times. And faith is grounded in **Humility**, the awareness that growth never stops, no matter how far you've come.

From that foundation rises **Discipline** and **Determination**. The daily structure and the relentless forward motion that outlast resistance. Effort without release tightens, so there's **Surrender**. Letting go of what you can't control so you can stay locked in on what you can. And when the pressure builds, you stay **Composed**. Mentally tough, unmoved by what tries to rattle you.

That steadiness creates **Peace**. Calm in the middle of motion. It lives next to **Peaceful**. Presence without haste, patience that lets the game come to you. And in that stillness, there's room for Joy. Energy freely expressed, effort fueled by connection rather than pressure.

None of it works without **Resilience**. The ability to absorb pressure and remain intact. To stay **Independent**. Owning your process, driven from within. To be **Different**. Original under scrutiny, divergent with intention.

And underneath it all? **Servant**. The quiet understanding that strength is measured by what the group gains. That's what it means to be **Blessed**. Aware of opportunity, grounded in gratitude, sharpened by perspective.

Then there's **But God**. The phrase that opens possibility and reminds us that no matter what happens, a higher perspective holds.

Read each word and you learn something about a player. Read them together and you see something bigger. A collective identity taking shape without anyone forcing it.

This is a group anchored in trust, grounded in gratitude, and committed to growth. A group where patience and intensity coexist. Where faith doesn't wait for proof and peace doesn't require silence.

More than words, these are operating instructions. Quiet reminders that live in lockers, in minds, in the moments between plays when what you tell yourself decides what happens next.

When you carry language like this, and when the people next to you carry it too, the work takes on a totally different meaning.

And the message is heard even when no one's talking.

Player Spotlight

The Words that Move Me

By Suites and Allan Houston

Jalen— Believe

Not Belief Belief is not certainty. It is the decision to commit effort without needing reassurance. Believe is the active for or belief that allows action to stay clean when outcomes are still undecided.

Josh— Peace

Peace is steadiness in the middle of motion. A calm interior keeps decisions sharp when everything else accelerates.

KAT— Servant

A servant places usefulness above recognition. Leadership expressed through responsibility, not visibility. Strength measured by what the group gains.

OG — Resilience

Resilience is the ability to absorb pressure without distortion. To remain intact while force is applied. Consistency that outlasts resistance.

Landry — Belief

Belief is trust in preparation when evidence is incomplete. It holds confidence steady across changing circumstances. Readiness sustained without external validation.

Jordan — Different

Different is divergence with intention.
The courage to operate outside expectation.
Originality maintained under scrutiny.

Deuce— Blessed

Blessed is awareness of opportunity, not comfort. Gratitude that sharpens discipline. Perspective that keeps effort grounded.

Mitch — Independent

Independent means ownership of process and progress. Responsibility taken without prompting. Growth driven from within.

Tyler — Determined

Determined is commitment that outlasts resistance. Persistence without urgency. Forward motion sustained through repetition.

Guerschon — Joyful

Joyful is energy freely expressed. Engagement without hesitation. Effort fueled by connection rather than pressure.

Mikal — Faith

Faith is trust exercised before results appear. Confidence placed in consistency and work. Stability maintained through uncertainty.

Ariel — Peaceful

Peaceful is presence without haste. Patience that allows learning to unfold. Composure held while the pace increases.



Behind the Scenes, In the Flow: Big Will and the Art of Showing Up Ready

Staff Writer



If you walk into Garden on game day, you'll feel the electricity long before the lights hit full brightness. Players lock in. Coaches pace. Staff move with purpose. Everything has a rhythm.

And somewhere in that rhythm is **Will Smith**—known to friends as Big Will—one of the team's equipment staff, quietly making sure the details are handled before anyone else needs to think about them.



Will joined us in December 2024, but his journey to that moment started long before a text message changed his morning.

"I woke up to a message from Kyle saying there might be an opportunity with the Knicks," Will told LEAD. "The day before had been rough. Then suddenly--boom. Everything shifted."

But that message wasn't pure luck but timing meeting years of consistency.

Before joining the Knicks, Will spent seven seasons with the Brooklyn Nets as a team attendant, working in visiting operations. That role doesn't come with applause, but it puts you close to the engine of professional basketball. It's where reliability matters, relationships form quietly, and reputations are built without announcements.

"I wasn't even asking for a job," Will said. "I was just being myself, showing up, doing my work."

That matters. In elite environments, people notice how you move when you're not auditioning. It's why, Kyle, the Knicks Head Equipment Manager left the message.

For Will, landing with the Knicks wasn't just professional—it was personal. Born and raised in New York City, he understands what it means to represent the city from behind the scenes.

"Out of millions of people who would want this job," he said, "there are maybe 90 of us in the world doing it at this level. I don't take that lightly."

What stands out about Will isn't just his role but all that he brings to the table including, a quiet swag, steady confidence and a remarkable range of skills.

During the pandemic, when barbershops closed and routines fell apart, Will noticed something deeper than messy hair. He saw how much grooming mattered to confidence and identity. So, he bought clippers, trained, and eventually became a licensed barber.

Today, Will also works part-time at Big Russ Barbershop in Harlem and is involved in reopening a space dedicated to helping at-risk youth and returning citizens learn a trade and build stability through skill.



"I love public speaking. I love music and being on stage,"

"It's about giving people something tangible," he told LEAD "A way forward."

That theme--tangible value--runs through everything Will does.

Then there's music.

Will's love for rap started in college, where friendly basement battles turned into something more. Over time, he realized he had a gift--not just for lyrics, but for commanding a room. Performing Trap Karaoke, including a standout 50 Cent set near Barclays Center, showed him how energy moves through a crowd when timing and presence align.



"I love public speaking. I love music and being on stage," he said. "There's something about feeling the crowd respond."

That skill--reading the room, adjusting cadence, staying present--isn't separate from his work with the Knicks. It's part of it.

Great teams aren't held together only by stars. They rely on people who understand flow, preparation, and trust. People who notice what's off before it becomes a problem.

When LEAD asked Will what the most meaningful part of his journey has been, his answer shifted the room.

He spoke about his mother, who passed earlier this year. About her sacrifices. About private education, Rice High School in Harlem, and becoming the first in his family to graduate college--earning a degree in Business Management with a minor in Sports Management from St. Francis College.

"She put everything into my education," he said. "Now I'm seeing what it produced."

That's the heart of this story.

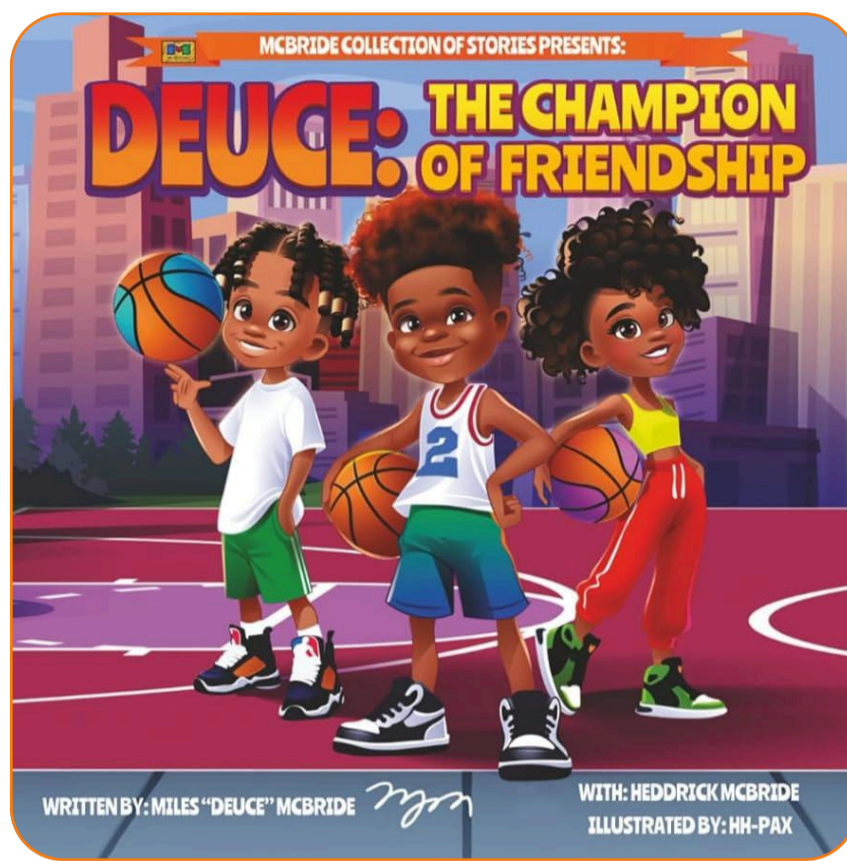
Will Smith is not defined by a single title. He's an example of what happens when education, craft, humility, and consistency converge. He is proof that excellence doesn't always announce itself--and that leadership often looks like readiness, not recognition.

So if you see Big Will moving quietly through the Garden, know this: the rhythm you feel? He's a part of it.

And New York is better for it.

The Culture File

Staff Writer



Book Pick

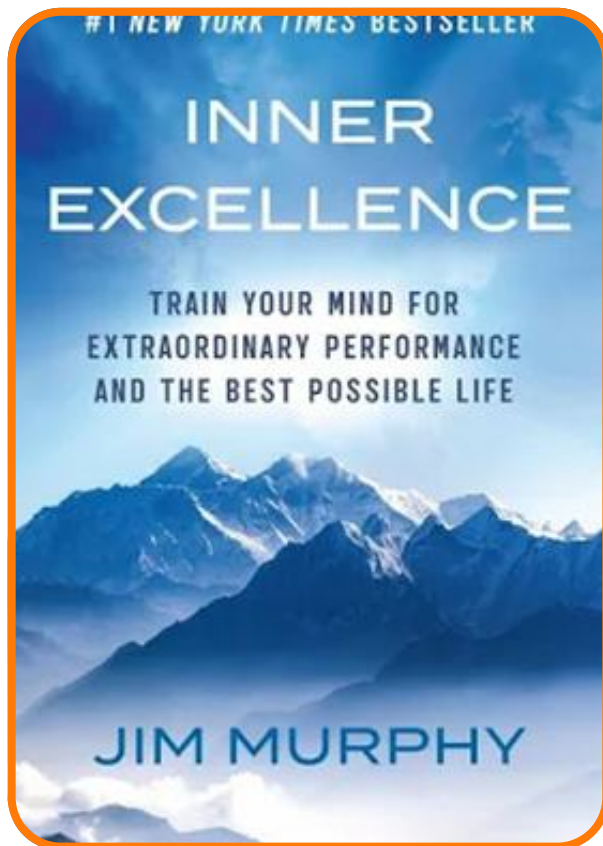
Deuce: Champion of Friendship

By Miles McBride

This is a kids' book, but the message isn't just for kids.

Deuce: Champion of Friendship is about loyalty, showing up for others, and understanding that who you are as a teammate matters just as much as what you can do. It's simple, intentional, and grounded in values that translate directly to real life and real teams.

What stands out is that it feels authentic. It reflects the kind of leadership that doesn't need noise — consistency, trust, and respect for the people around you. If you've got younger family members, this is an easy read to share. Even if you don't, the reminder still hits that success means more when it's built with others.



Book Pick **Inner Excellence** **By Jim Murphy**

This bestselling book is about mastering what happens inside when everything outside gets loud.

Inner Excellence focuses on staying steady under pressure, separating effort from outcome, and building confidence that doesn't swing with results. The message is simple: the best performers don't wait for perfect conditions. They train their inner world so they're ready no matter what shows up.

What hits is the emphasis on preparation over emotion. Control what you can. Stay present. Compete from a place of clarity instead of reaction. That mindset travels well — from practice to games, from wins to losses, from season to season.

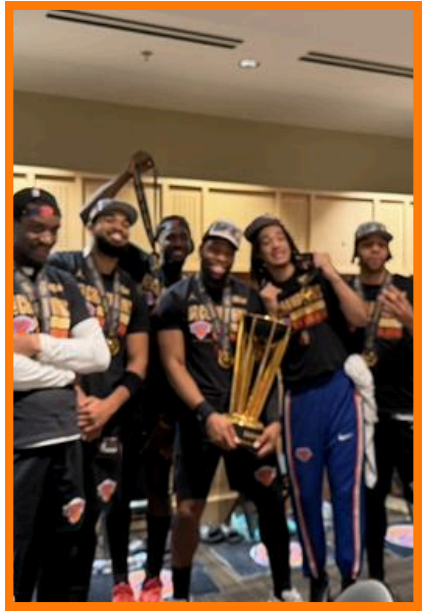
This is a quick, practical read that lines up with what elite performance requires: discipline, awareness, and trust in your process.

If you're looking for something that sharpens focus without hype, this one fits

Moments & Memories

EMIRATES NBA CUP WINNERS:

Photographs contributed by Quentin a.k.a "Q"



Words of Ancient Wisdom Spoken Before the Game

Staff Writer

Before every game, there is a pause.

No scouting report. No film. No corrections. Just a moment set aside before the noise arrives. Chapel happens then. It is open to everyone. All faiths. All backgrounds. Some people come to listen. Some come to reflect. Some just come to sit quietly.

That space matters.

This season, chapel has been **led by Allan Houston, who currently serves as our chaplain.** His presence is steady and grounded. He understands the spirit of the game because he has lived it. He understands the spirit of life because he has stayed open to learning from it.



The game will do the rest.

Allan Houston: Our Acting Team Chaplain

Chapel is not about telling anyone what to believe. It is about offering ancient wisdom and allowing each person to take what they need.

Across the season, several reflections have stayed with us.

One centered on foundations. Two houses built in different places. One on solid ground. One on sand. When the storms came, both were tested. Only one stood. The message was not about fear. It was about preparation. **What we build on is revealed when pressure arrives.**

Another reflection focused on talents. Three servants were entrusted with different measures. Two invested what they were given. One held back out of fear. The point was not comparison. It was responsibility. **Opportunity carries an obligation to act.**

We also reflected on seeds. Some fell on rocky ground. Some among thorns. Some on good soil. The seed was the same. The outcomes were not. Growth depends on where energy is placed and what is allowed to surround it. **Some environments nourish. Others quietly choke progress.**

More recently, we spent time with gratitude. Ten were healed. Only one returned to give thanks. **Gratitude was framed not as politeness, but as awareness.** A way of staying connected to what has been given. A way of staying grounded beyond outcomes.



Some environments nourish. Others quietly choke progress.

One of our own players also led chapel with a reflection on being salt and light. Not performative. Not loud. **A reminder that presence matters.** That how you show up, how you carry yourself, and how you treat others leaves an imprint whether you intend it or not.

These reflections are not about religion in a narrow sense. They are about life under pressure. About responsibility. About awareness. About what holds when things are tested.

That is the spirit of this space.

Chapel is open to all. It always has been. It is a place to encounter wisdom without labels, and to sit with ideas that have endured because they continue to speak to the human experience.

Chapel doesn't ask anyone to agree. It doesn't ask anyone to declare anything.

It offers perspective, then lets you carry it how you choose. Some people leave with a line that sticks. Some leave with a question. Some leave lighter than they arrived.

That's enough.

The game will do the rest.