



# Friend of the Court

Sports agent Erik Kabe (JD '14) helps NBA players maximize their potential

BY KELSEY SCHAGEMANN

**ON ONE OF ERIK KABE'S FIRST DATES** with a woman he liked, his phone rang. He took the call outside—and didn't return for 30 minutes. Such is the life of a sports agent. (Thankfully, the woman was understanding; the couple is now engaged.)

Kabe (JD '14), an agent with BDA Sports Management, represents NBA players Josh Richardson (San Antonio Spurs) and Grant Williams (Boston Celtics), among others. His career is rewarding but demanding, incorporating elements of being a coach, scout, publicist, mentor, parental figure, and friend.

A Los Angeles native, Kabe majored in political science at UC Irvine and graduated into the 2008 recession. He secured an internship at BDA, earning minimum wage while fetching coffee and faxes and generally making himself useful.

It's notoriously difficult to become an NBA agent; there are more agents than players. To keep his career options open, Kabe enrolled at Loyola University Chicago School of Law while continuing to work for BDA.

The gamble paid off.

Here, Kabe offers a candid assessment of his career thus far.

## On being an agent

The primary point of an agent is to maximize your player's earnings. If you think about the two overarching things that make up a professional athlete, it's on-the-court performance and off-the-court marketing. But everything starts and stops on the court. If your player's performance suffers, nothing else comes into play.

A lot of these guys are 18, 19. They're coming out of college and entering this highly competitive realm. So we're very focused on performance: professional-level training, nutrition, sports psychologists. We try to get them to wear sleep trackers—if you don't sleep well, you don't perform well.

You have to negotiate contracts. By far, that's the most important part of the job. There's also networking with general managers, assistant GMs, scouts. You're talking to your player's parents all the time—at least as often as you talk to your player. They're part of the journey, too.

## On doing whatever it takes

After I graduated from Loyola, I wanted to give the sports agent thing a real try. I was watching basketball nonstop, going to NBA events, networking with scouts. Josh Richardson at Tennessee caught my eye. My network wasn't very large then, so I sent a cold email. Josh's dad called me about a month later.

At the end of the college season, I was flying to Oklahoma City to see the Richardsons. The night before, every flight from Chicago to OKC was canceled because of tornadoes. I immediately booked



Grant Williams of the Boston Celtics is one of Kabe's clients.

a red-eye to Dallas. I got a rental car at 2 a.m. It's sleeting. It's dark. I don't know what I would have done without GPS. But I was determined to get there. I picked up my mentor, Bill Duffy, from the airport after getting maybe two hours of sleep. We drive to the Richardsons' house, and Josh's dad says, "Man, you look

horrible." So I told him the story. And it clicked. A few days later, Josh signed.

## On disappointment

During the recruiting process, you're trying to build a relationship with the player and his family, help them trust you,

show them your value. Make it clear that you're going to do a good job with their son's career.

You can recruit a guy for two to three years, and most of the time, you don't get him. I've gotten way more nos than yeses. You put in hundreds of hours, and then one day in March, you get a no. It's just part of the business. We say you get the guys you're supposed to get. I'm not sure if that's true, but it makes me feel better.

## On the things no one tells you

This is a 24/7 job. I've missed more weddings than I can count. I've missed birthdays and other important life moments with family and friends. It's a big sacrifice.

And it's very stressful. Your entire livelihood is based on how well someone puts a ball into a basket! The margin of error is so small. For the first three years of Josh's career, I was living off my credit card and doing legal document reviews on the side to make ends meet.

But I've done so many cool things. I've met icons of the game and famous musicians. I've been on private jets with amazing people and eaten at the best restaurants.

Most of all, it's very fulfilling being part of a player's journey—just to know you're part of something bigger than yourself. He's out there creating generational wealth. People in his family whom he'll never meet will be set. It's pretty cool to see someone put in the hard work and then it pays off for everyone involved. The best part is knowing I played a small role in my player's success. ■

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