



## The Draft, Trades, and Beyond

By: **Bill Ingram** Last Updated: 6/28/08 9:51 AM ET | 3864 times read

Each summer the **NBA** gathers the best and brightest young basketball players and holds their annual draft. The hard work and dedication it takes for a player to land in the elite company of draftees is often taken for granted. Most NBA players grew up playing the game, spending long hours taking practice shots, working out, and honing their skills in high school, collegiate, and private training sessions. What often goes overlooked is the amazing amount of work that goes into getting a player in front of the teams that wind up drafting them. The biggest part of that job is handled by a sports agent.

Mark Bartelstein's **Priority Sports Agency** represents players like Antoine Walker, Mikki **Moore**, James Posey, Luther Head and David Lee, and Bartelstein explains how the process of choosing new clients begins for his staff.

"Our philosophy has never been to go out and look at guys when they're really young, in high school or anything like that. We pretty much rely on referrals from current clients, coaches that we respect and trust, and we build the list of guys we're interested in based on those references. Then we start to really focus on those players, evaluate their games, and go from there."

Earlier this summer one agent told HOOPSWORLD that signing a lottery pick requires a suitcase full of cash. The subsequent revelation that players like OJ Mayo are sometimes on the payroll of agents before it's legal for them to be, shows just how high the pressure is when it comes to signing potential draftees. Bartelstein, though, is insistent upon upholding the rules and regulations that are supposed to govern the process. He doesn't feel violating policies is a respectable way to land clients.

"That's never anything we've ever done or even contemplated. We think that if we do a good job and do things the right way we're going to get the guys who fit in with who we are and fit in with our philosophy and share our values. We don't really worry about all the other things that go on out there because we can't control it."

This year Bartelstein had a number of potential draftees in the draft pool and was a part of the first trade of the day, which sent Brandon Rush from Portland to Indiana, and was also involved in the trades that sent Brandon Rush to Indiana as well as the blockbuster that sent Kevin Love to Minnesota and OJ Mayo to Memphis. He also had JR Giddens, who was chosen by the Boston **Celtics** with the last pick in the first round.

Not bad for a day's work.

"We're very involved in the draft process," says Bartelstein. "We're talking to teams every day, making decisions about which teams our guys should work out for, scheduling workouts, putting a plan together of who they should visit day by day - we're involved in the entire process."

It might seem like the most work would go into the picks who are projected to go highest, but leading up to draft day it's actually the lower picks that require the most attention.

"Obviously if someone is projected to be a Top 10 or Top 12 pick or something like that they don't need to visit as many teams as guys who might go at the end of the first round or early in the second. You've got to talk to a lot more teams for a player who isn't locked into being high up in the draft. For a lower pick you want to make sure you get as much exposure as possible with a lot of different teams."

More and more we're starting to see players take lucrative deals to play in Europe rather than ride a bench in the NBA or spend time in the NBDL. For Bartelstein's clients, however, it's still about the dream of playing in the big league.

"Each situation is different and it depends on the player and his level of development and what the opportunity will be with the team that drafts him. For all of these players their dream is to play in the NBA and most of them have great confidence that they can do it. We try to put them in the best possible position to realize that dream."

Once a player is drafted, the agent's job really kicks into high gear. The draft itself is an important step, but just the first of many more to come for a player and his agent.

"A big part of representing a player is not just getting drafted, not just negotiating contracts; it's managing his career day to day. It's continuing to try to put him in a position for good things to happen. We put him in the right place at the right time and make sure he's making good decisions. After the draft we manage his career day to day, there's contract negotiations, off the court marketing opportunities, and you're working on all of those things. It's all a big part of managing someone's career."

A lot of work goes into being an NBA player - long hours after school and on weekends doing nothing but practicing the skills that will one day potentially give a player the ability to compete on the world's biggest stage. At the end of the day, however, the hard work can be for nothing if you don't have the right person guiding you as you prepare to embark on a journey towards greatness. Parents, coaches, and role models all play important roles in a young athlete's career, but without the right agent they may never realize their true potential . . .to become a star in the NBA.