

Former Heat championship guard Norris Cole still going, just taking his game to different places

*By Ira Winderman
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There was a time when there only was championship basketball for Norris Cole. That was during his first two NBA seasons with the Miami Heat.

Now, as the league's annual free-agency frenzy is about to begin, even at 30, the 2011 first-round pick finds himself in a different place, halfway around the world — but also without losing sight of the city that fostered so much success at the start.

This is the other side of championship fame and constant reward. This also is the other side when it comes to giving back.

"My joy for the game is still there," the player known as much for his championship smile as his championship hardware said Friday. "I love to put the smile on. I still love to interact and entertain."

At a time when most NBA eyes will be in summer league in Las Vegas, Cole will be hosting a youth basketball clinic July 8-13 in Miami with his Norris Cole Foundation, in conjunction with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Miami.

“I train in Miami and I wanted to give back to the community that I played in that had a major impact in my life, and Miami was my first professional job,” he said of his ongoing ties to South Florida. “I developed friends who became family. That community helped me grow as a man.”

Eventually the other side of life as a basketball pro caught up with the energetic guard, first dealt to the New Orleans Pelicans in the 2015 trade for Goran Dragic and eventually out of the NBA after a brief stint with the Oklahoma City Thunder in 2017.

Through it all, the basketball passion remained, including stints in Israel, Italy and this past season in Montenegro.

“It’s the business of basketball,” he said of being cast aside by the Heat at the end of the team’s Big Three era, after appearing in three NBA Finals to open his career. “I wasn’t the first person ever to be traded, and I won’t be the last. So you don’t take it personal. That was my attitude about it.

“I keep in contact with the championship teammates — Shane Battier, my big brother Juwan Howard, Dwyane Wade. Dwyane actually, during my season in Europe, sent me some Way of Wade gear, which I appreciated greatly. It’s a brotherhood that never breaks. Those bonds will never be broken.”

Gale Nelson said it immediately became clear how Cole still resonates in the community when Cole visited the offices of Big Brothers Big Sisters.

"Norris has a championship legacy, part of a history in Miami, that everyone knows where they were with back-to-back championships," he said.

As part of next month's program, Cole will be donating \$15,000 to support 10 Big Brothers Big Sisters of Miami "matches."

"He certainly is someone they can look up to," Nelson said. "It's not just what he says, it's what he's doing."

As for his NBA calling, Cole said he remains hopeful.

"I'm still young. I can still go coast-to-coast and dunk. I still got juice in my legs," he said. "I always want to play in the NBA. That's always the goal, and I know I'm capable of doing that. It's just a matter of getting the right opportunity. It's a matter of an opportunity and the fit.

"I still get excited to wake up and work out in the morning. I still get excited to go out and play in front of 20,000 fans. I still get excited to compete against other professionals. Once I lose that joy for the game, it'll be harder to travel the world and play."

And, yes, the van that he had Heat fans sign at AmericanAirlines Arena during the team's championship run remains with his family.

"It's still parked, still with all the signatures on it," he said. "No one is driving that."

Through his work with the Norris Cole Foundation, Cole will work, teach and mentor at a youth basketball program July 8-13 at the Thunderplex Kendall (14251 SW 120 St., No. 113) and Tamiami Park (10901 SW 24th St.). As part of the partnership, Cole will be also be donating \$15,000. Registration is available [here](#).