

## draft day



Everyone wants to be drafted at least once in his or her lifetime. We all want to be among the “chosen.” I was drafted by the gym teachers at Hillside Junior High School to play on the ninth-grade all-star team. We tried out by playing in an after-school league in the gymnasium. Ten of us made the team. I was, by at least a mopy head of hair, the smallest. What made this so cool was that we got to play in a charity game one late afternoon against the gym teachers in front of the student body. It was a big deal. We didn’t have a football team, tennis team, golf team, or lacrosse team. This was it. We actually had some pretty good players, but they still beat us handily. I remember receiving Mr. Hale’s rather large right hip in my stomach at one point, which literally knocked me to the floor, where I slid for at least five feet for what seemed like an eternity, punctuated by laughter emanating from the nearby bleachers. It didn’t help that I was wearing what felt like silk, pajama-like, proud to have them, same-size-fits-all basketball shorts. I think I scored about eight points, mostly layups. I may have made a long, prayerful jump shot. I vaguely remember the PA announcer introducing me as Mike “Muscles” Snarr. But my memory is cloudy on some things.



On draft day in the NBA, usually held in late June of each year, teams choose players using literally mountains of research gathered from scouting trips, personal interviews with players and coaches, along with sophisticated analytics, but with little more street knowledge than the grade-school yard captain who chooses his kickball team at recess. In fact, his knowledge might be more extensive than all the pre-draft-day research any NBA team can do. After all, he’s grown up with these kids. He knows their moods, their egos, skill sets, and drive

to succeed (and impress the girl in the third row of class, for instance). He knows their parents, how smart they play, and just about anything else that might be relevant. He even knows of their propensity for injuries, sickness, and absenteeism. The difference is an NBA franchise could spend over \$90 million to assemble the team that they hope and pray can outplay 29 other teams for an NBA Championship. The school captain for the day may have to bribe his star player with some Starbursts or a Milky Way, at the most. Sports is big business—very big business.

Now, think about the 100-million-dollar gambles that NBA teams make every year. In 1984, Portland drafted Sam Bowie, an excellent player, over Michael Jordan. Bowie ended up breaking both legs over the course of his 10-year career and could never play up to his full potential. It's rumored that Chicago wasn't sure if they wanted Jordan, either. On the other hand, San Antonio drafted Tony Parker with the twenty-eighth pick in a late first-round choice in 2001 and got Manu Ginóbili with the fifty-seventh pick in 1999 (although he didn't play for the Spurs until 2002). As of this writing, both of them are still competing in the NBA today. The Jazz passed on these guys too. But they didn't pass on John Stockton or Karl Malone, two middle-of-the-pack, first-round selections who played injury-free longer than any other tandem in NBA history. Compare those two selections with lottery picks like Greg Oden, Michael Olowokandi, Kwame Brown, and other first picks who didn't play (often due to injuries) or didn't fit with a team long enough to get to the NBA Finals, something the Jazz did twice with Malone and Stockton. Of course, teams tend to draft big players early on. As Frank Layden often said, "You can't teach height." Even then, an NBA draft choice is an educated guess at best—a bit of a crapshoot. Of the 64 number-one picks in the NBA from its inception to 2013, only 17 players have ever reached the finals, or roughly 25 percent. In business, at least that percentage of startup companies fail too. Building a sports franchise or a business entity takes money, time, wisdom, and especially resilience until you find the right product, the right people, and in the case of an NBA franchise, the right players. Without them, support will dwindle over time. From a distance, I knew all of this. I knew I didn't have any desire to work for

an NBA team, where my very existence might depend on how well a young 22-year-old kid could shoot a jump shot.



During that first meeting with Manny Floor, President of Triad America, in the spring of 1983, he offered me a job, proposed a salary (which I accepted) and a title (which I didn't accept). He wanted me to be the Director of Marketing for Triad America. I asked him who I would interface with most, and he said the vice presidents on his management team.

I said, "Manny, if you want me to be your chief marketing officer, I think I need to have the title of Vice President. Otherwise, your senior management could end up running your marketing program."

It only took him about two seconds to agree.

On the first day at work, Manny took me to my office and told me to order furniture through his staff. Weeks later, upon visiting my new office, he asked me, "Where did you get this ugly furniture?" When I told him I'd ordered it as he had instructed, he said, "It's not good enough. I'll have a designer redo it immediately."

I was grateful to Manny, who took care of almost every need I could think of, as well as a few I hadn't. But I also knew of Manny's reputation as a hard-driving, hard-working businessman who logged long hours and expected his senior staff to do the same. I knew this was the honeymoon phase of my career at Triad America, and I knew it wouldn't last long.

One of my responsibilities for Triad was press relations. I hardly had to lift a finger since all of Salt Lake City was watching Manny Floor and Triad America lay out a plan for a new metropolis on the west side of the city where no one had tread before. It was dreamlike: tall buildings, hotels, cutting edge retailers, an ice rink and an outdoor stage for live theater, a renowned restaurant, and state-of-the-art office space behind high-arching entryways and flower-laden walkways. Manny even designed a motorized trolley system to bring shoppers and businesspeople to Triad Center from the heart of downtown Salt Lake City. Of course, this required an unlimited budget, which Manny had

extracted from the richest man in the world (at the time), Mr. Adnan Khashoggi of Saudi Arabia. Triad America, the parent company, under Manny's direction, was receiving almost unlimited press and business attention throughout the city. We seemed to smother every other story except one: the Utah Jazz.

In the spring of 1984, for the first time in their five-year Utah history (and actually their entire ten-year history as a franchise), the Jazz did, indeed, make the playoffs. They had a pretty good team. Good enough to beat Denver three games to two in the first round and go six games in the second round against Phoenix. Ricky Green started at the point. Darrell Griffith played the shooting guard (an understatement), and Adrian Dantley started at small forward. Together, Dantley and Griffith had averaged 50 points a game during the season. John Drew came off the bench to tally 17 points a game. Ricky was good for 13 points a game, and Mark Eaton blocked 358 shots during the season while collecting almost eight boards a game. Dantley and Green were NBA All-Stars while Thurl Bailey was named to the NBA's first-string rookie team. Best of all, Frank Layden was deemed coach of the year while winning 45 games, a 15-game improvement over the previous season. But the Jazz was in trouble early in the playoffs, losing one of two games at home and then another game on the road. That's when a Denver journalist editorialized that the Jazz had "no heart" and predicted that the Nuggets would win the series. I'm not sure who engineered it, but I'm guessing public relations director David Allred, Jay Francis, the marketing director, and Grant Harrison, game operations and promotion director, were the ones who quickly countered with the "Jazz Have Heart" campaign. Soon, heart stickers were visible throughout the marketplace, in every in-game promotion, and on just about every Jazz fan in the arena. The press did their part too. The Nuggets lost the next two games, and the Jazz advanced to the second round. I don't know if the Denver writer kept his job or not. Hope so. By the way, the drafted players in the starting lineup for the Jazz that season were Darrell Griffith (second pick of

the 1981 draft), rookie Thurl Bailey (seventh pick), and second-year player Mark Eaton (seventy-second pick). Today, Eaton would be an undrafted player. Dantley and Green came via trades, and John Drew, a big contributor and former rookie of the year, also came via trade as part of the Dominique Wilkins deal. The draft does not a championship team make. At least, not initially.

Eaton was discovered by Frank and Scott Layden (with a lot of help from Eaton himself) embedded—no, in fact—buried at the end of the UCLA bench in his senior year. Many would now agree that he had the biggest long-term impact on the Jazz franchise from the class of 1983. Mark, who didn't log even one minute at UCLA that year, resorted to sending a video tape of his pregame warm-up "highlights," featuring a series of dunks, to each NBA team at the conclusion of his college career, promising to anyone who would take a chance that he would make a difference for their team as a player in the NBA. Seeing the tape and thinking there was nothing to lose, Frank and Assistant Coach—and son—Scott made an appointment to meet Mark at the UCLA gym that spring. As they sat across from the entrance to the gym in the bleachers, a stream of players walked through the door looking for pick-up games or just a hoop to practice on. After waiting for some amount of time, they finally saw a large body duck under the doorway and enter the gym.

"Lord, I hope that's him," Frank pleaded. It was.

Eaton played in all 82 games during the 1984–85 Jazz season. Only one other player did that: rookie John Stockton, drafted sixteenth. John had been discovered at Gonzaga University as a senior by Jack Gardner, a former legendary University of Utah Head Coach, who after retiring, became a scout for the Jazz.

Supposedly, he had called Frank Layden one day and said, "I've just come across a player who I think will become the NBA's greatest point guard, second only to Magic Johnson."

When the Jazz drafted John Stockton in the first round with what became their only pick of the draft, I was sitting in the audience at the Delta Center, and I remember some fans sitting nearby asking, "Who's he?" There were even some boos scattered among the 4 to 5,000 fans in the arena. I also had a chance to attend the press conference af-

ter the draft when John Stockton addressed the media. Manny Floor had asked me to attend since Triad America via Adnan Khashoggi was in the process of making a bid to share ownership or buy the team from owner Sam Battistone. I guess Manny thought we might soon be spearheading PR for the team. Luckily, Adnan would not make a full financial disclosure, and the NBA wisely said no to his bid to buy into the team.

I remember thinking John looked a lot like a couple of the guys I played pick-up basketball with at the local gym. I'm sure many "ballers" at the time thought "I could take him one-on-one." Some professional players probably thought the same thing, all the way to the 1997 NBA Finals. During the interview, John seemed very shy, but I remember him saying he would make it in the NBA.

John played behind Ricky Green, who Hot Rod Hundley deemed "fastest of them all" during his play-by-play broadcasts. But Stockton was already peering down the bench at Coach Layden during each game, waiting for his number to be called while he kept an eye on the court, learning everything he could about playing in the NBA. John did end up playing in every game, but we fans watched him struggle a little, at first. By all rights, at six foot one and not known for being incredibly quick, fast, or an adroit shooter (yet), John probably should not have been an NBA prospect. Jack Gardner, Frank and Scott Layden, and others in the front office thought otherwise. Turns out they were right. A long way right.



For different reasons, I probably shouldn't have been working for Triad America, either. But it was glamorous, and it provided me with corporate experience that I could draw on later. Experience I wouldn't have gained working in the ad agency business. Triad America was a big company with a diverse senior management team. Each member (including me) had been given ambitious goals by Manny Floor, who reported directly to Adnan Khashoggi. Adnan came to town to assess his new Utah real estate empire from time to time. He was a jetsetter who hung out with people like Brooke Shields and other stars, a world

traveler with private jets and yachts, a man who owned over 35 homes and, coincidentally, a mountain in Spain. He would soon be featured in the *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* TV series.

I was well paid by Triad America, but as my wife and I watched the show highlighting him on TV, I turned to her and quipped, "I'm underpaid." I didn't know it then, but I would soon meet Adan for the first and only time. It was a day I would never forget.



Even though the Jazz wouldn't get past the second round in the 1985 NBA Playoffs, they would still have plenty to talk about. With 456 blocks, Mark Eaton would break the NBA shot-blocking record and be named the league's Defensive Player of the Year. John Stockton would be named honorable mention for the NBA All-Rookie Team, and Darrell Griffith would break the career three-point NBA record. Maybe most importantly, the Jazz were fun to watch. None of us knew that with the addition of next year's first-round draft pick, a guy named Karl Malone, the Jazz would become formidable for the next 15 years and wouldn't miss the playoffs again until 2004. That's 19 consecutive years in the NBA Playoffs, making the Utah Jazz the third most-winning team in the NBA during that period. You can probably guess the other two.



Several weeks before Adnan's arrival, Manny called me into his office and explained that Adnan would be there to get a read on how things were going. They weren't going extremely well at that point. The biggest challenge was attracting people to Triad Center, the first leg of Manny's massive development. Manny wanted me to cover some of our key marketing initiatives for Adnan while others spoke to operational issues like retail sales, leasing progress, building construction, and the overall future of the project. When it was my turn to enter the conference room where Manny was hosting Adnan, I was very, very surprised. Shocked, actually. I think I took a very big, deep breath

when Manny introduced me to Adnan and his entourage of friends, family, and advisors, not to mention some national and international reporters, including a reporter and cameraman from Good Morning America, the ABC national morning news program. Even though they weren't broadcasting live, I felt warm beads of sweat accumulating under my arms as I shaded my eyes from what seemed to be unbelievably bright camera lights across the table. By then, I was used to making presentations for important clients and constituents, but this was a whole new level.



In the spring of 1985, approximately the same time my armpits were heating up in Mr. Khashoggi's conference room, the Jazz was making another playoff run. This time, however, they wouldn't be so fortunate against Denver, who took them 4-1 in the second round. The first round was historic, though. In Texas, the Jazz beat Houston 3-2 in an almost unbelievable come-from-behind victory in the fifth game. Sports fans will remember this as the game when Hakeem Olajuwon would punch Jazz center Billy Paultz in the head in frustration while he negotiated for position in the paint. Up until then, the Jazz starters had trailed Houston, and things looked bleak in the fourth quarter. That's when last season's Coach of the Year Frank Laden took out all the starters and played a second-string group, which included former Brigham Young University standout Fred Roberts, who was a reliable shooting guard and defensive menace, Bobby Hansen, mellow Rich Kelly, and big man Paultz, among others. Things started to turn. Soon, most Utah sports fans parked in front of their TVs (including me) had to stop screaming at Frank in order to start cheering for the team. By the time Hakeem swatted Billy, the Jazz were in a position to win the game, and soon after, they did. Whenever I wanted to second guess a coach for what seemed like a reckless substitution, all I needed to do was think of Frank's crazy fourth-quarter game plan. I realized then that coaches happen to know intricate little things about the makeup of a team and their collective ability to perform in unusual conditions that a fan will never know. Frank sensed something that day, and his seemingly hap-

hazard approach to that game generated significantly more revenue to the team when they advanced to the second round.



Maybe Manny didn't warn me about Good Morning America being there for my presentation to Mr. Khashoggi so that I wouldn't lose too much sleep the night before. But it took less than 20 minutes for me to cover our marketing initiatives, and Adnan only asked one question, one I couldn't answer: "How are the trolleys doing bringing people to Triad Center?" Despite his infrequent visits, he had picked up on a key problem: Foot traffic in and around Triad Center, especially in the retail shops, was sporadic at best. I didn't have a good answer, but before I could open my mouth, Manny stepped in with something like "It's early. It will take a little time, but people will come." But they never did. At least not in the crowds that were needed to sustain the retail shops and restaurants. Manny affectionately called Triad Center the "Gathering Place," but not enough people gathered there to make it profitable.

Triad Center was a very visionary project. I knew that as soon as I looked at the beautiful scale models scattered around our corporate offices. The problem was simply that people didn't need to come to Triad Center to find good restaurants or shopping opportunities. Wonderful choices awaited them just outside their office doors in and around Main Street, Salt Lake City. Why go farther? I knew Triad Center would work, but maybe not for five to ten more years. It was clearly an unfinished masterpiece way ahead of its time.

One of the more interesting experiences I had while working at Triad Center was with office space. My office size reflected, more or less, the state of well-being of the company. I started with a medium-sized office that, as I mentioned, Manny had redecorated at the International Center, a Khashoggi office/warehouse project designed for businesses that wanted to be close to the Salt Lake International Airport. I then moved to another office roughly the size of at least one handball court, maybe two. It had a very nice desk and enough furniture for a hotel-sized executive suite. Next, I moved to a newly constructed Triad Cen-

ter office building downtown. My office was large and well appointed, albeit not quite as stately as the one at the International Center. But it wouldn't be many months before I would be a lone man in small cubicle trying to wrap up a few dangling marketing projects for a large international bank who was foreclosing the property.

At the time, things at Triad America were mostly status quo. Manny thought it was only a matter of time before people made coming to Triad Center a habit, and he had all of us working overtime to finish projects. There was, however, a growing sense of urgency and perhaps just a little concern among some of us about where things stood. One of the undertakings that was drawing more than a little attention involved the two planned office towers on the south side of the main block of Triad Center. Unfortunately, the only visible part of the project was a pile of steel girders that were supposed to help change the skyline on the west side of town. It seemed like they had been there for months, and in a meeting, I suggested to Manny that we should try to have a ground breaking to dissuade someone from the media drawing unneeded attention to us. He agreed. One of the things we decided to do for the event was have "dueling" tractors face off on the property in front of a grandstand constructed for dignitaries and the media. Manny was an eloquent and polished public speaker, and he had fun describing those two shoveled vehicles. I think we even talked a couple of city officials into sitting in the cabs with experienced drivers. He also drew everyone's attention to the 20-story-high balloons that marked the location of the future buildings. You can never predict how something like this will turn out. The forecast for the day was warm and sunny, but it was actually warm, sunny, and very, very windy. So, the balloons were blowing wildly overhead while dust from the dueling tractors settled on city officials and the media. Not an ideal moment, but Manny Floor made the most of it, effervescently describing the soon-to-be transformation of the block and gesturing with one hand while he tried to hold an errant tie inside his suit coat with the other.

With some potential trouble averted, we were pressed by Manny to work even harder. He wanted a marketing plan he could submit to Adnan, so my colleagues—mostly one of my trusted co-workers Mark Linford—and I began writing. And writing. And writing. Ap-

proximately 50 pages and many late nights later, we handed Manny a vinyl-bound book about eight inches by twenty inches in size, outlining every marketing project that we had planned for the next two years. Of course, most of these initiatives were never completed, and years later as I reflected back, I thought of the business quote by American animator/cartoonist, Walt Kelly: "Having lost sight of our objectives, we redoubled our efforts." One of the positives of this exercise, however, was a sort of reduced version of a marketing plan, which I created for our various project managers to use as they considered what marketing tools were needed to accomplish a task. It included a section for objectives, challenges, solutions for media, marketing, and press and event opportunities. I styled it similarly to a model we used, which Bruce Jensen had created at Fotheringham & Associates. Years later, Mark Linford told me he had continued to use this guide in subsequent marketing positions he held for various companies. Sometimes we can learn important principles that will benefit us even from what looks like the most fruitless exercise.

One of the most important things I needed to learn while working at Triad was taught to me by my wife. She taught it to me one Saturday afternoon when she had suggested we take a ride together. I had an uneasy feeling as soon as she said it.



In the 1985 draft, the Jazz selected Karl Malone, then Carey Scurry, and finally Delaney Rudd, who ended up having a pretty good career in the NBA. Carey Scurry was a very intriguing selection. He appeared to have some raw athletic talent, but the Jazz, worried about big-city distractions, included, reportedly, a \$10,000 bonus in his contract if he stayed in Utah during the off-season. When you realize that these young kids, especially those from less-favorable circumstances, can easily be lured back to a previous life of mischief and trouble, it made sense to attempt to keep them more focused on things that could help them leave that life behind. But it didn't always work, and contractual clauses like this were usually hard to enforce. Nevertheless, I thought the Jazz was pretty creative when it came to drafting, keeping and help-

ing players reach their highest potential. That would become more apparent to Jazz fans in the next few years.

But for the 1985–1986 season, the team missed Darrell Griffith, who broke his foot and was absent for the entire season. They could have also used Pete Maravich, who hadn't played since 1980; the team retired his jersey in December. Still, the Jazz finished 42–40 and qualified for the playoffs for the third consecutive year.



My wife, Tamie Merrick Snarr, was one of the most relaxed and easy-going girls I ever dated. Easy to be around. Easy to please. Lots of fun. Even tempered. Energetic. Natural beauty. But when I was late for our wedding pictures, her soft voice escalated to a shrill-pitched babbling sound that was so cute I started to laugh, not realizing she was angry with me.

On our ride up the canyon that sunny afternoon, things were different. She was her normal, even tempered self, but not the happy, easy-going girl I had married. She wasn't fuming like she did the day we had our wedding pictures taken. Something was up. After an uneasy silence interspersed with a few exchanges of mock pleasantries, she began to share what was really on her mind. After telling me she loved me, she stated that this wasn't what she had signed up for. Not the marriage she wanted. Having me work from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. almost every weekday, eating a rushed dinner in order to attend church or civic meetings, and watching me work at least four to five hours on Saturday mornings in our study was not going to work for her. She made it clear (which really shook me) that she could live another life without me if I didn't change. Further, she said she'd be happy to live in an extremely modest house in an inexpensive neighborhood so I could find a less-demanding job, one with hourly wages and set hours. Although it was unsettling—pit in the stomach unsettling—I have been grateful for that little lecture ever since. It helped me see more clearly what was really important: familial relationships, friendships, and time to enjoy each day—time spent with important people. She was campaigning for a more simplified life instead of all the success that might come from

an overly complicated, rushed, and stress-filled lifestyle. That lecture helped me realize the importance of living a balanced life. Nothing beats balance. Not money, fame, looks, or success.

My father used to compare our lives to a large house. Every room is important. Every room needs attention. Every aspect of our lives needs attention. If we let one room go unattended for long, it's much harder to clean it up and make it a functioning place again. If we don't pay attention to every aspect of our lives, we lose perspective. We're out of balance. I wished I had listened more intently to his analogy earlier, but luckily, Tamie gave me a second chance.



As the 1985–1986 season began, the Jazz had a very young nucleus to build on, but they wouldn't become a championship-caliber team for a decade. The lineup included second-year player John Stockton, rookie Karl Malone, third-year veterans Thurl Bailey and Bobby Hansen, along with Mark Eaton, who was entering his fourth year in the NBA. And yes, it would take a decade and a year, a coaching change that kept Frank Layden involved as the heart and soul of the team, a passionate new owner, some additional roster changes, and a new arena before they would make it all the way to the finals. Sadly, Adrian Dantley wouldn't make it into the next season. And John Drew only played 19 games in the previous season and didn't make the 1985–86 roster. As a former member of the All-Rookie NBA Team and selected NBA All-Star in his sophomore season, Drew was indeed gifted. But his demise was pretty rapid once he started using drugs. The Jazz had no choice but to waive him early in the 1985 season, even though in 1984 he had been named the Comeback Player of the Year by the NBA. No one else on the team that year was a consistent off-the-bench scoring threat like Drew had been. I'm sure the team felt his loss in its first-round exit from the playoffs, losing to Dallas, one game to three. Today, John Drew is a much happier man, living and working in Houston. But oh, what might have been.



Meanwhile, Triad America was getting ready to make an epic collapse of its own, stranding hundreds of workers and dedicated employees in its wake. I knew it was imminent the day Manny Floor walked briskly into my office and asked me how much we had spent in marketing. After I gave him an approximate number (it was a lot for those days), he told me to stop all spending unless it was something we had contracted to do. By then, I had nearly 20 people reporting to me. I became worried. Manny had a knack for hiring talented people, but he also had a huge soft spot for someone who couldn't find a job (often due to a health problem), and my staff included several capable people who would probably struggle to find other employment.

Just months earlier, my wife and I, along with about 30 other executives of the corporation, flew in one of Adnan Khashoggi's private jets to Santa Barbara, California, where we attended a "backyard" symphony concert, featuring the conductor of the Utah Symphony and a symphony assembled from around the southern California area. We stayed at Adnan's brother's summer home. To say we were treated like Saudi royalty is probably not an overstatement. I remember the symphony program was embossed on gold-leaf sheets. Drinks and refreshments were served, and we spent the weekend on Essam Khashoggi's Santa Barbara ocean-side estate. At one point during the dinner, complete with a mariachi band, I turned to my wife and said, "This kind of corporate living cannot go on forever." It was clearly over the top, even though it was a wonderful gesture from Manny and the Khashoggis.



In the spring of 1986, the Jazz drafted Stephen Curry's dad, Dell. He was long and lean, but strong. He had an "NBA body," one that could withstand the demands of an 82-game season. So did Theodore "Blue" Edwards, a yet-to-be selected player in a future draft. He was nicknamed Blue because he "looked blue" when he was born, according to his parents. Luckily, he quickly recovered and went on to develop that NBA body. In fact, I heard that our trainers told him to feed his six-foot-four, two-hundred-pound frame all the greasy hamburgers

it could handle so he wouldn't develop anemia by the end of the six-month season he was about to undertake.



It's interesting how some "bodies" make it in the NBA whereas some don't. Many collegiate All-Americans who had taken their teams to the NCAA Finals were top selections in the draft but never stuck with a team. These were great talents who excelled in college but just didn't quite fit in the NBA. Wes Mathews, who was undrafted and a walk-on with the Jazz, had that NBA body. Being big and strong enough to play the small forward or the shooting guard, he surprised just about everyone in the league. Unfortunately, the Jazz was surprised when Portland offered him about \$7 million a year or more to play for them after his rookie year with the Jazz. One-year wonder or long-term find? The Jazz gambled a bit by not matching the offer, and Portland eventually lost him to Dallas. But it looks like he'll be around for a long time in the NBA.



Tony Parker did not have an NBA body, but he was stealthy, quick, and had the outside shooting and passing skills to become an NBA All-Star. Raul Lopez, who the Jazz drafted ahead of Tony, looked like he had all that quickness, passing, and shooting ability, too, but he tore up his knee trying to play in the NBA. John Stockton was overlooked by 15 other teams before the Jazz took him. Steve Nash was highly touted, but I doubt many teams would have predicted he'd play almost 20 years in the league at a very high level. Another reason draft day, albeit exciting for fans, can be a frustrating and ultimately unrewarding exercise for an NBA team's front office.



During the spring of 1986, I would never have guessed that I would be "drafted" by the Utah Jazz to sell sponsorships in the NBA. I

was pretty sure, however, that I wouldn't be working for Triad America the following year. The future didn't look good at Triad America. We all knew or at least sensed it. One by one, I pulled the members of our marketing department aside and quietly alerted each of them about our situation. I encouraged them to get their resumes on the street and to find something else as quickly as possible. Thankfully, I was able to help a few of our people find other, and in some cases, even more lucrative career paths.

The next several months left me completely exhausted. How could a multi-billion-dollar balance sheet of the richest man in the world slide into near oblivion? I remember telling Tamie that everyone has a bottom line. It might be further away for some, but there is a break-even point for all of us, and if we aren't paying attention, we'll reach it without even knowing. What happened to Adnan Khashoggi could happen to anyone. Perhaps the economy took a downturn. Perhaps politics entered in. Perhaps he took his eye off the ball to do a little vacationing, and while he was away, the world changed. Saudi Arabia—I'm guessing—no longer needed a middle man to make deals for military equipment with the United States. In the blink of an eye, he was unable to continue creating a revenue stream to feed all his other ventures and assets, not to mention Triad America. For some reason, I decided to stick around even though bankruptcy was imminent. I felt I owed it to my staff, in an off-handed way, to be the last man to jump ship. I wasn't being a martyr. I felt like I had enough skills to land somewhere, so I didn't worry. Besides, it was a tremendous learning experience, albeit one I wouldn't want to repeat.

I have to say that I loved my staff. They were talented, energetic, committed, and dedicated to accomplishing our goals. We were a good team. I remember worrying most about the young woman who oversaw the newsletter we published and sent to all employees. She worked hard, and I wasn't sure what the prospects would be for her finding a company big enough to have a full-time staff for an in-house publication. What really worried me was that she had Rheumatoid Arthritis, and she had deteriorated since I first met her. Manny had previously hired her, as he had done with most of the others who worked with me. I fretted while she appeared to remain calm, or maybe she was

more or less resigned to things. She was no longer physically able to do some of the tasks she had been hired to do. It broke my heart, and I felt helpless.



Frank Layden, on the other hand, didn't love everyone on his 12-man roster at the Jazz. What coach does? It was common knowledge that Frank struggled in his relationship with Adrian Dantley. One night during the 1985—1986 season Frank sent Dantley home following a halftime locker room discussion in Dallas. He never played for the Jazz again. Frank called it “addition by subtraction.” It doesn't occur often in the NBA. Players are employees, and they can be fired, too, even for one game. Message sent. Dantley was later traded, along with two second-round draft picks, to Detroit in August of 1986 for Kelly Tripucka and Kent Benson just a few months before the Jazz would acquire my rights—so to speak—to join the team.



By then, things were messy at Triad America. Most of my staff had safely jettisoned from the company, finding new opportunities. But a few of us stayed on. I not only felt a kinship with my staff, but I was undyingly loyal to Manny Floor, for whom I had great respect, but he actually left the company before I did. I had also picked up more responsibilities, including overseeing the theater, ice rink, and other Triad America assets that were being evaluated. Jim McPherson and I made a run to save the outdoor summer theater, which mostly staged traditional Broadway musicals. The theater, headed up by a very talented and artistic woman, Pat Davis, was finally entering the black after being unprofitable during its early existence.

Overall, we employees knew we were on the Titanic of businesses in Utah. Not many could miss seeing all the news stories or hearing all the street chatter regarding its catastrophic demise. We were still the talk of the town, but not in a good way. Near the end, Manny would actually travel halfway around the world on a private jet with Adnan

Khashoggi to look for investors for Triad America. It was a gallant effort. I remember hearing that Manny and Adnan had been as far as Singapore looking for bailout money. But it wasn't to be.

In a rather bizarre, last-gasp attempt, Manny found some businessmen from Canada, who he flew into Salt Lake to meet his senior staff. We had dinner with our significant others at a local restaurant, but no one there, including the out-of-town guests, had a good feeling about things. Apparently, our suitor had some ties to the underworld and left town rather abruptly after evaluating things and running up a nice tab in some of our shops.

Sometime during that summer, the Jazz invited Tamie and me to be their guests on a sponsor trip for clients. They were headed to the Caribbean for a week on a cruise ship. The invitation was precipitated by us becoming a sponsor of the Jazz. We bought a large sign and a couple of other assets—prompted by Manny—the year before. Larry Baum, who headed up sponsorship sales, a good friend from my days at Channel 4 Television (he headed up sales there, and I headed up marketing), approached me about the idea. I told him we couldn't accept the invitation because I knew we would not be able to be a sponsor the next year. When he encouraged me to come anyway, I told him confidentially that it was my belief that Triad America would not be in business next year. A few weeks later, he extended the offer again, just a week or so before the trip. We accepted. I figured another sponsor had cancelled and they had plane tickets and a cruise ship cabin they were probably going to pay for anyway. And, I had been up front with Larry about our company's dreary situation. I'm very glad we finally accepted. We got to know some great people, and we had a blast, even though I worried about Triad America's situation constantly. The islands were beautiful, and the trip was a restful respite from the grueling days at Triad. Tamie and I had never been on a cruise, so we made the most of it. I remember playing basketball on the deck of the ship with Grant Harrison, Jay Francis, Randy Rigby, and the team president, Dave Checketts. The games were cut short, however, after we lost three basketballs over the side of the ship in the first few days at sea. I can't remember which one of us had to go back to the cruise line's activity chairman to ask for another basketball each day, but salespeople have

to learn how to deliver bad news, so it was probably Grant, who headed up game operations but also worked in sales.

When I returned to Triad, I realized it was only a matter of weeks before the banks would foreclose. Dejected and uncertain, I prepared a resume and began to think about the future. Manny was nowhere in sight, and Rich Nordlund, a hard-working man with extensive real estate experience, was running the company. Rich kept me (and others) informed, but the day soon arrived when we were told that we were in receivership to a large international lending company, and they were coming in to clear the decks. Even though we all saw it coming, it was a very depressing day. The reality of our demise began to take hold. I was very lucky, for I received somewhere in the vicinity of a two-week severance package and a chance to be a marketing "consultant" for the bank, along with about six to seven others, including Rich Nordlund and some of our accounting staff. I had even been assigned a small cubicle from which to work on a few remaining marketing projects. I had started with a wood-paneled office with high-end office furniture, lots of space, and a full staff, and there I was, virtually alone in a big hall-like office filled with a half-dozen mostly empty cubicles. I didn't realize how fortunate I was until years later when I reflected on those days in between careers!

I had a base of operations. In an odd way, it felt good. I still felt employed although I wasn't. Kind of comforting in an off-handed way. So instead of working from home and nursing a five o'clock shadow into a full beard, I got up every morning, worked out, stretched, showered (and yes, shaved), dressed, and left for work. Frequently, Tamie would say something like "Stay home, and we'll take a drive, go to lunch, take in a movie, make it a fun day." But I told her that if I did that for even one day, I might not ever want to work again. My new "job" wasn't difficult, though. I logged a few hours on behalf of Triad each day, worked on some unpaid freelance projects for friends, stayed involved with a couple of non-profit organizations like the local Children's Museum, and found time to work out (often at the local gym about two blocks away from my office). I spent most of my time networking with friends, business associates, and others whom I had worked with over the years. But in reality, my time was my own. You could almost say I had retired. Scary thought.

In retrospect, going to work each day was one of the best decisions I ever made. It helped keep my spirits relatively high. I knew I would land somewhere. In fact, I had offers from my old ad agency. Bob Fotheringham even visited me at our home one day to ask if I'd come back. At least two or three other ad agencies made overtures, as did a savings and loan association (they needed a marketing guy), and I also explored a couple of ideas on my own. Then one day, out of nowhere, Larry Baum, now of the Utah Jazz, and with whom I had worked closely at Channel 4 Television when I was the marketing director and he was the sales manager, walked into my cubicle area.



The most highly anticipated day for any college basketball player who believes he can play in the NBA is draft day. For him (and maybe someday, her), nothing can top it—not even marriage. Although, in my opinion, not even being a number-one draft pick is more important than choosing the right partner with whom to form a lasting union. Still, draft day is an incredibly important day if you can shoot, pass, block, or rebound a basketball at a very high level. The challenging aspect of this is that someone else is about to choose him, and thus it will determine every aspect of his career for some period of time. He could end up playing on a last-place (most likely) team or a championship-caliber team. He could end up on a team full of egotistical players who can't get along, or he might end up in the perfect situation, landing on a team that will be patient while they mentor him and help him prepare for a bright future. But wherever a player ends up, someone else is about to change his life, including who will coach him, the city where he'll most likely reside, the organizational culture he'll be immersed in, and how much money he'll make (and it's a lot, by any standards) for at least the next three to five years. He'll be considered a veteran in the NBA before he really gets much of a chance to change things. Or he might not really fit in with his team, get traded, or potentially waived right out of the NBA.

Teams, on the other hand, deal with a couple hundred personalities (in a few cases, multiple personalities), combing a myriad of gymnasiums, arenas, and maybe even playgrounds to find a few good fits (in

any one draft) for their team. A lot, an awfully lot, is on the line. A few bad decisions can mean a coach or general manager being fired. And how 12 players, including a couple of new draft choices, fit together and perform will either entice paying fans or keep them away, perhaps watching but a few games on TV. The team won't be the darling of the community, and a very savvy VP of basketball operations might be looking for cover from fans, staff, and owners.

Consider what a team's front office of roughly 10 to 15 people does to prepare for the annual summer draft day, usually held around the end of June:

1. They scout all the major US colleges and key foreign professional teams, including China, Russia, Australia, New Zealand, and all of central Europe. They travel to most of these countries themselves to watch games. Even the most avid basketball aficionado would welcome a night at the opera (or maybe even season tickets) after a couple years of watching mostly teenagers heft up jump shots or gather in rebounds.
2. They talk with coaches, scouts, independent consultants, broadcasters, former players, current players, and maybe even their spouses.
3. They gather all possible video footage from almost every game in which a touted future NBA prospect might play, reviewing what literally amounts to miles of footage over the course of a season.
4. They study every NBA team roster, looking for possible trades and especially analyzing who they might be looking for in the draft.
5. In the front office, financial wizards evaluate the NBA salary cap to see how much they are currently paying their team and how much they might be able to pay for a top NBA prospect. This is much more complicated than it appears. Each player contract has escalation clauses, not to mention nuances and elements that might or might not affect the NBA Collective Bargaining Agreement and ultimately the team salary cap. Our guy, Bob Hyde, before he retired, had to be considered one of the top "capologists" in the NBA. A miscalculation could cost a team millions and millions of dollars. But Bob was always at the top of his game.

As draft day approaches, teams begin to closely evaluate top targets, studying strengths, weaknesses, personalities, medical history, and even family histories. You think scouts didn't take note that Stephen Curry's father, Dell, played for a very long time in the NBA, often shooting the "lights out" himself? The team also studies how players perform in pressure situations, their dedication to fitness, strength, and how well they co-exist with teammates. If ever the phrase "no stone left unturned" had merit, this is it!



Larry Baum and I had stayed in touch a little bit over the years. Part of my job at Channel 4 Television, the local ABC Network affiliate where we both worked, was to support our sales staff as they competed with other local TV stations for commercial-spot sales. It seemed like we couldn't produce sales pieces fast enough. The station was riding high, leading in ratings in many day parts (times of the day when different programs aired). Our local newscast rankings lagged behind the other two stations, but we otherwise had a very good story to tell, and we were busy every day trying to tell it. I left for the ad agency business (my dream), and Larry had quit the TV station suddenly one day, packing up his family and taking them to Hawaii indefinitely. He had become disgruntled with management and decided that he had enough money to last for several months, at least. When he needed to work again, he landed a job with the Jazz overseeing sponsorship sales. I wasn't surprised to see him that day, but I was surprised he said, "What are you going to do now?" in reference to Triad being bankrupt.

"Not sure," I replied.

"Why don't you come to work for the Jazz?" he countered.

"Is that a job?" I said.

"Yes, we're starting this sponsorship sales area, and I need help getting it going."

"Let me think about it," I answered.

I called a couple of friends to get their take on things. "Is that a job?" they asked me.

Then I called Tamie and told her that Larry Baum had made an overture. Based on my one-day market research analysis, I said, "Doesn't sound like much of a job."

Her very wise counsel still rings in my ears. "Mike, dear, may I remind you that you do not have a job. I'm pregnant. We're almost out of insurance. We need a new roof on our house. Why don't you get serious about getting a job?"

I called Larry Baum that afternoon; actually, I saw him at the gym where he played handball and I played basketball. We talked. I met with Dave Checketts and Larry the next morning. We discussed a few things, and I accepted their offer. I had been drafted just a few days before Halloween (my wife's favorite holiday) in 1986, six months after the Jazz had drafted Dell Curry. The season was just a few days away. Dell and I were teammates, although we never met. We were both rookies for the Utah Jazz.

## chapter two takeaways



1. Have a game plan. But be willing to throw it out the door. That's what Frank Layden did when his down-and-out team beat the Houston Rockets in a playoff game they never should have won.
2. Cash is king. In 1979, the Jazz probably saved the franchise and the opportunity to stay in Utah by trading Dominique Wilkins for cash. Live on less than you make or know someone like Dominique Wilkins who owes you.
3. Above all else, live a balanced life. Luckily, I have a wonderful wife who helped me understand the importance of our relationship. A good marriage wins over a good career every day.
4. Negotiate your title before you start your job. You'll never have more leverage than you do when someone else wants to hire you. Make the most of it. That's what player agents are hired to do. Since you probably don't have an agent, that's what you have to do too—for yourself.
5. Realize that we all have a bottom line, including the richest person you know. When we pass below it, we put our financial and personal lives in jeopardy. Learning to manage our personal resources is probably the smartest business trait one can develop.
6. If the corporate hammer falls on you or your company just falls apart, stay upbeat. Continue to work to fill each day with productive steps towards your next job. Use that time wisely and manage to have some fun along the way without taking your plight too seriously. Things tend to work out.
7. Know that your reputation is your most important possession. Finding a new job quickly is predicated on how well you can speak about your accomplishments in your last job and how well people from your last job can speak about you.