



Jelani Gardner

Biographical Information

Jelani Gardner is the principal of JAG Basketball, with over 30 years of basketball experience. Gardner was one of USA Today's top 5 players in the United States coming out of St. John Bosco High School in 1994. That same year he led Bosco to their first CIF Southern Section Championship, with a victory over the tough Compton Dominguez team. He was named California "Player of the Year," joining past award recipients Jason Kidd and Paul Pierce. That same year, he was also named a McDonald's All-American and was ranked the number one high school point guard in the country, competing against and ranked with Chauncey Billups, Allen Iverson, and Kobe Bryant.

After a stellar college freshman year at UC Berkeley, Gardner was named Pac 10 freshman of the year, averaging 13.7 points and 6.7 assists per game. Then, a routine

physical found protein in his urine, a sign of kidney failure. Gardner and his family were informed that he would need a transplant immediately. This news was overwhelming for the 19 year old; unaware that this was essentially the end of his lifelong dream of playing in the NBA. He quickly made the decision to transfer to Pepperdine University to be closer to home and The UCLA Medical Center. Gardner continued to play his last two years of college at Pepperdine with failing kidneys.

Despite his medical problems, the years at Pepperdine went well for Gardner. He played for highly respected college coaches Lorenzo Romar (University of Washington), Randy Bennett (St. Mary's College) and Kenny Ammon (Concordia University). The Waves battled conference powerhouse Gonzaga for the WCC title in two consecutive years, finishing second in both, 1998 and 1999.

During the 1999 NBA Draft, many insiders felt Gardner had the talent to be an NBA all-star. The fact that he was a 6'6" point guard, with exceptional court vision and shooting ability, intrigued NBA personnel. Gardner's kidney problems were still relatively unknown. He was sick internally, but outwardly appeared to be an elite NBA prospect. Gardner met with many NBA teams, including the Indiana Pacers, the Los Angeles Lakers, the Chicago Bulls, and others. At the end of the draft camp, however, Gardner could not pass the physical. No one from the camp could believe it. Though seemingly facing the end of his NBA dreams, he began a worldwide education that would prove invaluable.

Gardner played the next 12 years professionally throughout the world. He played in Israel, Germany, Australia, Russia, France, Slovenia, Venezuela and the Dominican Republic. It was during this period in 2002, that his kidney function reached a critical stage. Encouraged by his mother to follow up with doctors, Gardner was immediately put on dialysis. His mother, at 53 years of age, by the grace of God, tested positive as a match to Gardner. The transplant surgery took place on March 31st, 2002. A new lease on life was given to Gardner; but he was still facing yet another string of challenges, after a month spent recovering, he began his comeback to professional basketball.

Now able to pass the physical, the NBA was again an option. Gardner was invited to play in the summer league with the Indiana Pacers. However at 26 years of age, and 3 months removed from an organ transplant, Gardner began to realize that his body hadn't yet fully recovered. Soon after, Gardner got his first offer post-surgery to play basketball in France.

Because of the professional basketball community's fear of a player post-organ transplant, Gardner was only offered a one-month contract. With his career in question, Gardner put complete trust in God. After two average games, Gardner scored an amazing 29 points, 9 rebounds, and 7 steals. This performance earned him the contract extension he needed to finish the season. The following season Gardner led the French Eagles in scoring at 23.7 points per game. He also added 5 rebounds and 5 assists per game. Bringing awareness to other clubs in Europe and the NBA that Gardner had returned to his previous level. This led to an amazing 10-year stretch that took him all over the world. The education was priceless, not just in basketball terms but in the currency of life.

JAG Basketball is about youth using basketball as a tool to help them develop into individuals of character. Often in the game of basketball it comes to the point where the individual has to show the mental fortitude to accomplish the goal at hand. Whether that be to make three shots in a row, or run a line drill in a certain time, or complete a dribble

move ten times without losing the ball. This is where the player needs an extra push, or the proper instruction to push through the fatigue and get the job done. What good is practice if you're practicing twenty percent intensity and performing the action the wrong way? The key is to maximize every rep, and train at a maximized intensity level. A player who does this, learns the proper fundamentals. He plays with total freedom, because the skills and confidence are there from the diligent work put forth. Jelani Gardner knows from his own experience and from the thousands of hours of work he put forth. Basketball is a truth teller—you only get out of the game what you put into the game. With that said, let's get to work. JAG Basketball, Hard work and Dedication!