

Game On!



Courtesy of warriors.com and NBA Entertainment

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Game On! By Frank Cusumano Ladue News

In the history of St. Louis basketball players in the NBA, **David Lee** takes a backseat to very few. Ed Macauley, Bill Bradley and Jo Jo White are the only players from our area who have accomplished more than Lee.

He is one of our town's unsung great professional athletes. Perhaps it's because he wasn't on a state champion team at Chaminade. Or maybe it was because he played his college basketball at Florida. Or maybe it's because he's low-key kid who doesn't toot his own horn. However, consider this, on April 2, 2010, Lee exploded for 37 points, 20 rebounds and 10 assists against the Golden State Warriors. Lee became the first player since Kareem Abdul-Jabbar in 1976 to record at least 35 points, 20 rebounds and 10 assists in one game.

Lee is a special talent. That's why the Warriors signed him to an \$80 million contract last year. He is one of the few players in the NBA who actually score more as professionals than as collegians. Every season, he is one of the league leaders in double doubles (that's double figures in points and rebounds in the same game). Last season was one of Lee's best. He averaged 20 points and almost 10 rebounds per game while shooting 50 percent from the field.

Lee's always had two wonderful qualities to his game. He was blessed with a tremendous vertical jump. He won the slam-dunk contest at the McDonald's All-American game with a fantastic dunk, where he took off his jersey while he was in the air. **He honed that vertical jump with a lot training sessions at Hammer Bodies.** He also has developed his ball skills. He can handle it and pass it as well as any power forward in the league. Lee has worked with trainer and former Webster Groves star Drew Hanlen to develop those skills.

I caught up with David after he recently completed a training session with Drew.

How do you get better than 20 points and 10 rebounds a game? *You can get a lot better. You can average 25 and 15. You can also be a more efficient 20 and 10. The biggest thing we have worked are my weaknesses offensively and how I can improve ball-handling and shooting, and a lot of my stuff comes down to footwork.*

When did you know that that you were different than most kids? *I think it was mid-way through high school. I thought I had a chance to be a pretty good college player. That was always my goal. I don't think anybody thinks about being a professional player. It just seems so far-fetched with the thousands of kids playing basketball, to think you could be one of the 400 in the league.*

Weren't you blessed with vertical jump? *Yeah, jumping was always something I could do. I am losing it now. (Lee is 29 and he is not really losing it). I am trying my best to keep it. It was something that came naturally. I didn't do a whole lot of leg workouts or stuff like that.*

How is it that you average more points in the NBA than you did in college? *Some guys are like that. I have come out of my shell in the NBA and had some opportunities to be more aggressive offensively. I think my game is more suited to the NBA than to college. I have worked on my game a lot--working on my jump shot and becoming more multi-faceted.*

What was your awe moment in the NBA? *My second game as a professional: I played against Dirk Nowitzki. He was one of the guys I really admired. I scored 15 or 16 points--I held my own. I knew then I was one of the luckiest guys in the world.*

Do you ever say to yourself, I can't believe that this happened to me? *I am one of those guys who is trying to get better. I won't be able to truly enjoy it until it's all over. Hopefully, that won't be for a while. It's still amazing to think I have gone from a pretty good high school player, to a college player, to an NBA All-Star, to captain of a major franchise who will hopefully make the playoffs this year. It's pretty special to think about it--but I won't be able to enjoy it until it's all over.*

5 THINGS I THINK:

1. Books on tape is one of our greatest inventions. It's like you're watching a movie in your head. I couldn't make a trip without them.
2. The Sicilian Omelet at Chris's Pancake & Dining is so good, I have to smoke a cigarette after I eat.
3. The character, Alan, on *Two and a Half Men*, rivals George Costanza as the best actor ever on a sitcom.
4. Frank Haith is one of the nicest college basketball coaches I have ever been around. It will be nice to see some great high school players from our town actually end up at Mizzou again. Mike Anderson didn't believe in coming to St. Louis unless it was to speak to alumni. He wasn't very good at that, either.
5. Has Dan Dierdorf ever done an uninteresting interview? Of all the people I interview on TV and radio, he is consistently the most entertaining. He is a treasure for our town.