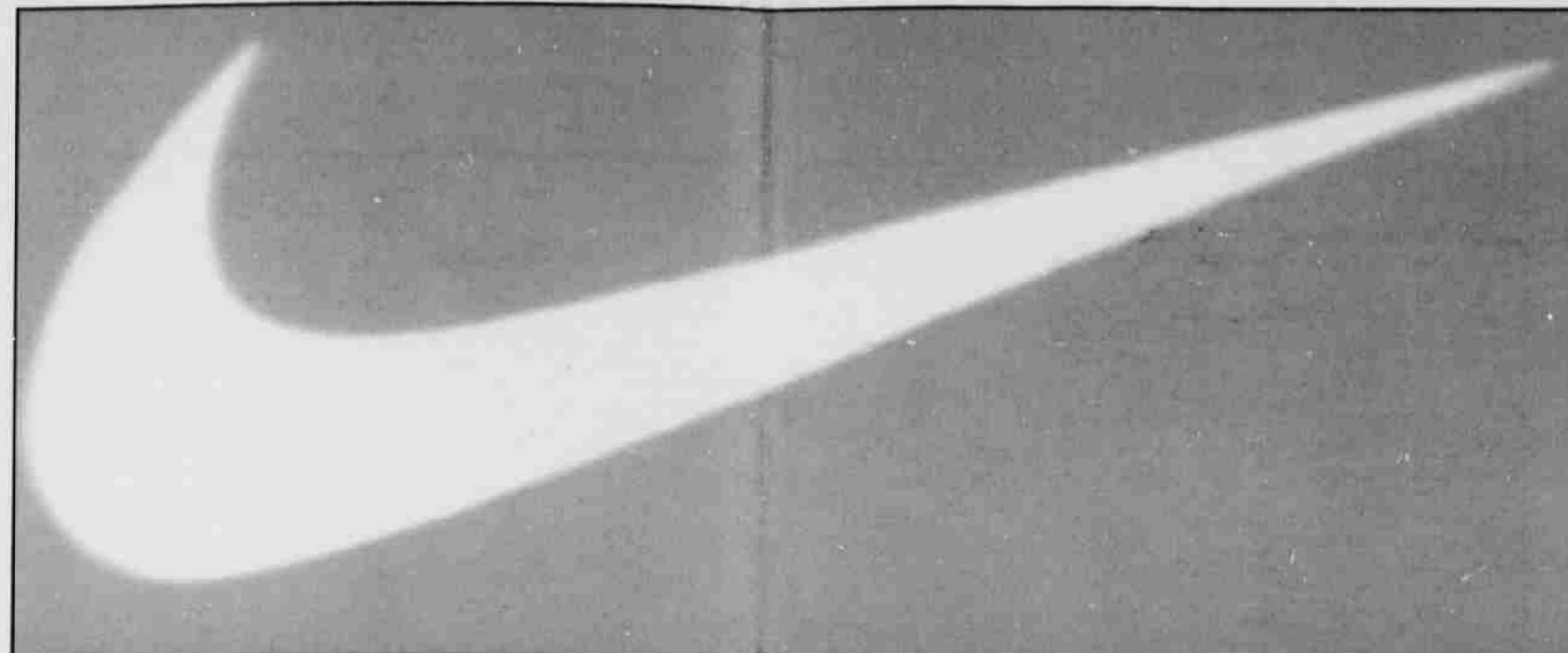


Nike Hosts Six Indian Basketball Teams



World Headquarters — The beautiful Nike World Headquarters Campus in Beaverton, Oregon, is where Native kids from all over the United States got to spend a day touring the campus, practicing basketball and learning about Nike's story, from its humble beginnings in Eugene, to its becoming the world biggest sneaker producer. Nike has increased its outreach to Native communities in recent years by hosting tournaments such as these and hiring Native liaisons.



Photos by Peta Tinda



The Future — Native kids mug for the camera at the evening banquet, held at the Torrey Pines room of the Tiger Woods Conference Center.

Nike continued from front page — Tablequah, Oklahoma, and the Lummi Indian School in Bellingham, Washington, also a Tribally-funded high school, but not a boarding school. Two others were invited but could not make their schedules work.

Like more and more schools today, the travel part of this event has to be shoe-horned into small budgets, and the way this group of schools has made this work is by scheduling it around Christmas time when government funding is available for the kids to go home anyway. "This just adds an extra leg to the trip," said Chemawa

Athletic Director Jerry Mack. And the host school makes sleeping and eating accommodations available.

"A lot of our kids have never been out of town," said Sequoyah Principal Gina Stanley. "They were amazed at the airport that it looked just like a mall. Some had never seen a mountain before and they're appreciative of the opportunity."

"We look forward to (the basketball tournament at Nike) as soon as the season starts."

—Elizabeth Guzman
Native Athlete, Flandreau Indian School

give these schools from unique backgrounds access to the largest sports company in the world."

As a result, the kids got a day at Nike headquarters. They practiced on one of Nike's famed basketball courts and enjoyed a taco dinner. Emcee of the dinner event was Indian personal

trainer Kevin Rush. They got a Nike t-shirt. They heard a pep talk by former Philadelphia 76ers

Carroll, who now holds the title of "Katalyst" at Nike. Carroll held out the possibility of a future relationship with Nike to the young players.

"To realize one's destiny," said Carroll, "is a person's only obligation."

For Jerrod Coriz, a shooting guard for the Riverside Indian School, Carroll "made me think about what my future is."

He said he wanted to thank his coach because "we're getting the opportunity for all this."

For Nike, this was one part of a Nike Native American program that includes a Native American Network of Nike Employees, Native American Diabetes Program and a partnership with the Indian Health Service to promote healthy lifestyles and healthy choices for American Indian and Alaska Natives.

Standing at the entrance to Nike's world headquarters in Beaverton, in front of the Steve Prefontaine Hall, the John McEnroe Building and the Alberto Salazar Building, Elizabeth Guzman, Flandreau's center, said, "We look forward to (the tournament) as soon as the season starts." ■



Nice Shot— Native kids shoot some hoops at the Bo Jackson Sports and Fitness Center Gym.



Players — Native youth arrive at the Nike campus after journeying from all over the country to attend the Native Basketball Tournament, now in its second year.

Assiniboine Tribal Member Wants To Help Young Native Athletes

■ Nike's Native American Program Manager Sam McCracken works for the largest sports-related company in the world and sees an opportunity for Native people to live a healthier lifestyle — diabetes free.

By Peta Tinda

Sam McCracken has many goals, but first and foremost, he wants to help Native athletes achieve their full potential.

He is in a unique position to do so as Manager of Native American Business for Nike, one of the most powerful and influential companies in sports today. He develops relationships between the numerous Tribes he works with and the executives at Nike, who have demonstrated willingness to embrace the many young athletes in Indian Country.

Like a lot of the young Natives he works with, McCracken comes from a rural background.

He grew up on the Fort Peck Indian Reservation in Montana, where he worked at a ranch. He drove a swather, moved cows and picked rocks.

In the late seventies, his mother moved to California, where he attended and graduated from high school. Afterwards, he got a job coaching high school basketball, and became close friends with Tony Dorado, who also works at Nike.

In June of 1997, McCracken re-connected with Tony, who asked him to submit a resume. Sam was hired and started working in the shipping department, where he would receive containers for warehousing and shipping.

In July of 1997, he was asked to meet with Curt Mudd, Director of Nike's United States Human Resources Department, about revitalizing Nike's Native American Employee Network.

Then in July of 2000, he assumed his current role of Manager of Native American Business.

"It combines two very innovative programs," said McCracken. "First is the Diabetes Initiative Program, which provide Tribal Diabetes programs access to Nike Products, to ship directly to reservation or community health programs at wholesale prices, to use as an incentive for Native Americans to pursue healthy lifestyles and utilize the product.

"By coming to me they can have access to a vast selection of Nike products at wholesale prices through the Nike.net program," he said.

The second element of his job is as Native liaison to the office of Indian Education Programs, a government agency set up to support the efforts of local Indian agencies Tribes and other entities to meet the educational and

culturally related needs of Native Americans.

He also sits on the advisory committee for the Boys and Girls Club of America where he acts as Native representative.

McCracken travels all over the United States encouraging Natives to get involved in sports and pursue active, healthy lifestyles.

"I am the external face of Nike in Indian Country," he said. "I am asked to be at a lot of Native events. I'm proud to be a part of all of that."

He is involved with 65 different diabetes pre-

vention programs Nationwide as well as 26 different Tribal schools.

He also fulfills his traditional managers role of making sure the user is extremely satisfied with the service they are receiving.

He tries to spend only about two weeks in the office each month.

"I think it is really important to be out in the community so I can understand what's happening, if they have a question about access. It keeps me real. I want to be out there in Indian

Country... to be a true representative."

McCracken is motivated for several reasons, not the least of which was losing his mother to diabetes. "She was my whole world... in 2002 she went into a diabetic coma and died six days later. "And obviously meeting Notah Begay," said McCracken. "His family has diabetes."

Begay, who was sponsored by Nike, was the only Native on the Professional Golfer's Association tour last year and is a role model for many young athletes.

"The numbers speak for themselves," said McCracken. "12 percent of Natives over the age of 18 have type-two diabetes. The amputation rate is three fourths the rate for Natives as it is for non-Natives."

By encouraging Natives to get involved with sports, McCracken wants to help lower those numbers.

"Basketball in particular is the heartbeat of Indian Country. If I can do anything to help kids, I will, whether it's helping to open the door for exposure to the right college coaches or if they need to get in front of the management," he said.

McCracken says that he always refers back to his coaching background for guidance and inspiration.

"Seeing the impact on kids lives is a gratification that I can't put into words."

He says he feels proud that Nike has embraced Indian country. "They do great work. I feel very proud to be a Native here and to lay the groundwork."

He is also working with the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde to organize activities for youth to participate in.

"...So stay tuned and we'll see what happens," he said.

He encourages other Natives to look at Nike for employment.

"If I can do it, then they can do it. I mean, I didn't get here through the traditional path. I feel fortunate that the creator chose me. I'm here to do the right thing and I'm very passionate about that." ■



Sam McCracken

Photo by Peta Tinda