

COURTNEY CHARLES & THE RAPTORS905 ARE DREAMING BIG

by matt cullen

Sauga960's Matt Cullen recently sat down with the Raptors 905 VP of Basketball and Franchise Operations, Courtney Charles. They had a chance to discuss the team, the pandemic and Courtney's rise to become one of the leading sports executives in Canada.

MATT CULLEN: The new NBA G League season is already underway. What are your initial thoughts?

COURTNEY CHARLES: It's great to be back home. After just being in a pandemic and dealing with the life changes, how we've had to pivot and learn from these experiences. Being in the G League bubble last year - that was really well done by the G League - it was great to compete and to be among our peers, our colleagues playing the game and coaching the game we love. But to be home, there is nothing better. To be back in Canada, to be back in Mississauga, to have our players to be able to experience and learn. And culturally, to see what it is and means to be a 905 player and employee as well as seeing the building open and seeing all the people that we work with. It's been nothing but spectacular.

MC: I want to talk about your personal journey. You're from Toronto. You began in this industry as an intern with the Raptors back in 2006. What would you say is your biggest key to success in your rise up to your current role?

CC: It's something that you continue to work hard at and you don't realize how much you've been able to accomplish sometimes until you stop. You kind of look back at where you started and where you're going and where you plan to push yourself even further. It's a huge shout out to all my mentors and the people who have set me up for success. Rob Babcock, Bryan Colangelo, Masai Ujiri, Mr. (Wayne) Embry, Theresa (Resch), Bobby (Webster) and Dan (Tolzman) have all been key in building and growing not only myself but the people around me. It's been a great journey and I don't feel that it is over anytime soon.

MC: We're seeing a growing list of successful and rising Canadian sports executives and Courtney, you're certainly part of that group. I'd like to ask you as a member of this exclusive club, how much of a role model do you see yourself and what advice would you give to the next generation?

CC: I'm humbled to be a leader in this area. Not only being diverse and being in the sport-business world, but being someone who has been able to experience a championship at the G League level when we won in 2017 and obviously, with the Toronto Raptors in 2019. So it's something that I'm truly humbled to do, to be able to live out my dreams and to see this experience for the youth. It's important to encourage our youth to realize that this game is growing. There are so many different ways that our sport can involve into. There are all different types of ethnic groups, all different type of jobs and positions.

MC: What has been your biggest key to your success in this industry?

CC: The first thing is to dream big. For me coming from an Athletics background, once I was able to realize that I probably wasn't going to be the fastest person in the world, I started saying that I wanted to go back to being part of basketball. At that point, it wouldn't be on the floor. I was able to see more of the business side and understand the growth of how we bring players along, the ways of impacting and contributing to this game and the business of how you can take something from point A to point B.

MC: How has the landscape changed business-wise for the growth of Canadian basketball over the last several months?

CC: The biggest thing is that we are a Sport and Entertainment business and we are supported by our amazing fans across Canada. So, for us not to be in person, for us not to be able to meet and see our players or our fans, that was hard. The business is generated through revenue and that is done through the attendance, merchandise, food and beverage that is purchased at an event. That hasn't happened over the last couple of months. For us to be successful, we have to continue to get back to what is our normalcy. But we're going to do that in a safe manner. We're going to make sure that everybody is in a safe and healthy situation to participate in some form to watch our games.

MC: The Raptors 905 play a huge part in Peel Region and Mississauga. What role do you see them playing going forward and engaging with the community and ultimately growing the game of basketball.

CC: What we're going to do is continue to educate. We're going to continue to help the youth, understand the importance of education. We're going to also encourage everyone to realize their social responsibility on giving back and making sure that we're in all the different communities to support everyone. We've got to become more humane in treating everyone fairly and equally; making sure that everybody has an opportunity at a great life. The Raptors 905 are using basketball as a tool and a way to connect and bring belief and confidence to people.

All Raptors905 Home Games can be heard exclusively on Sauga960AM. For the complete audio interview, please visit www.sauga960am.ca



courtney charles

matt cullen