





BY ERIC BUTTERMAN | PHOTOGRAPH BY BRUCE GILDEN

The Dreamer

From a killer season with Duke to the recent DUI controversy, MF was there for the ride as one of the NBA's top rookies, J.J. Redick, prepared for the day that would change his life forever.

Basketball,

like life, is about repetition. You can always look back and say it came down to that one moment when everything changed. But, more than likely, it was all those moments you spent preparing that really made the difference.

J.J. Redick knows that firsthand. He spent many of his most important moments growing up in Roanoke, Va., with his three older sisters and younger brother. And when the 22-year-old hoops star wasn't on the court, it was always his family that was at the center of his life. Knowing that, it should come as no surprise that earlier this year—on the day of the NBA draft, a day that would change the recent college grad's life forever—his stress wasn't over what team he might be joining in his move to the big league. Rather, he was focused solely on trying to find a tie for little brother David. Talking with Redick on the way back from the purchase, it's obvious the act was more one of levity than annoyance. "Well, we have to make my brother look good, right?" he chuckles, heading back to his hotel for a little downtime before the upswing of finding out what NBA team and city he'll soon call home.

It's the kind of laugh you might not expect to hear when, just two weeks before, Redick was staring down a DUI and the embarrassment that comes with such a public scandal. Prior to that, the biggest national exposure Redick had experienced was the debate over whether he deserved to be named College Basketball Player of the Year, not whether he deserved to have his license suspended. But more than the blow to his ego, it's what the DUI took away from his family that truly bothers him. "I never expected to be arrested and charged with a crime," Redick says. "I'm embarrassed . . . ashamed by what I've put my parents through during a time that should be special for them."

Although he may have made a mistake with his DUI—one he takes seriously, to be sure—Redick still feels it can't take away from all the right decisions he's made along the way, all of them adding up to fulfilling many a youngster's dreams: an NBA career. "I grew up watching Michael Jordan like everyone else," he says. "You saw the Bulls and their runs and you just wanted to be a part of that. Jordan could hit anything." Redick has hit a few shots in his career, too. Leaving Duke as the all-time NCAA leader in three-pointers, Redick wasn't just a star—he was the kind of player all NCAA hopefuls aspire to be.

Considering a college career of that magnitude, and the fact that he was named one of the best players of the year in the league, it's unusual Redick's star power isn't brighter. Indeed, some experts are predicting he'll only end up being drafted 11th and 12th in the first round. But with just hours to go before the big event, Redick isn't too worried—at least that's what he keeps telling himself. "The right fit for me is a team that will give me a chance to play right away," he says. "Some guys care about that more than others. There are teams that didn't have much success, so they're looking to make some changes—that gives me an opportunity. But if I end up on the wrong team, I could be riding the bench for a while."

Although it may sound like youthful bravado, you can forgive Redick for wanting to help a team climb its way up from obscurity rather than just being handed a championship ring in return for a seat on the bench. After all, he's already played with the best. By being recruited by Coach Mike Krzyzewski and heading to Duke to play college hoops with the Blue Devils, Redick's been a part of what could arguably be considered one of the very best teams ever—one that's won three national championships in the past 15 years.

Redick points to this as being the one thing that's helped him through the circus that is the NBA Draft. "I'm used to the interviewers and their questions," he says. "When you play for Duke, that's as close to the NBA as it gets. Everyone's watching you." Redick recalls just being in a room with people smoking marijuana and how his high-profile school and celebrity blew up the event in the eyes of the media. "I was the only one mentioned in the story even though I wasn't smoking," he says. "It wouldn't be unusual for someone my age to be hanging out like that. But when you're part of such a successful team, you just can't make those mistakes. It's not the same rules for me."

ENTERING THE WHIRLWIND

"From the moment our season ended, it's felt like one long tryout," says Redick, who—in preparation for the draft—worked out for six NBA teams, including two stops with Utah. "But then my back injury came into play." Redick's herniated disc meant he had to trade in shooting and rebounding for rehab, to the point where he could only do a mere physical for the 76ers. "There's nothing worse than not being able to play," he says. "I'm a competitor, and I want them to see what I'm capable of." One former 76er, Charles Barkley, actually told Redick what he *wasn't* capable of when they bumped into each other at the same Philadelphia restaurant recently. "He said I had to get bigger or there was no way I'd be successful in the NBA," Redick recalls. "He also told me my ball-handling needed some work." But Redick, in awe of Barkley's career, doesn't consider the comment a dig. "He was just telling me how it is. My ball-handling does need to be better, and it *will* be."

Perhaps that's why Redick never seems to tire of the advice that's thrown his way, getting tips even on the day of the draft from Vince Carter along with many of the league's other top prospects. "Meeting so many great players over this time—it's a blur. It's been a whirlwind for me."

Already today, Redick's endured an early-morning breakfast, player-development meetings, security briefing, and a barrage of media interest. "You can see the NBA is taking every step possible to make us feel special," Redick says. "We just had lunch with [NBA Commissioner] David Stern and all of our families." Then, of course, there was his brother's tie fiasco, which led him to Saks Fifth Avenue with reporters and our own *MF* photographer in tow. As we end our conversation, just hours from his dream coming true or crumbling around him, Redick assures me he'll have plenty to talk about for our second interview, post-draft. In fact, the only thing he finally admits is that he's not so sure of what will happen when

the inevitable takes place: the moment his name is called by Commissioner David Stern—the moment he becomes a professional basketball player.

AND THE 11TH PICK . . .

As the draft begins in New York's Madison Square Garden, J.J. Redick is a bundle of anxious nerves and energy. But unlike when he's at his most relaxed, loose and in the moment on the court, this time all he can do is wait—standing in the building Hall of Famer Walt Frazier and übercoach Phil Jackson once played in and dying to see how it all turns out. His agent knew one thing for sure, Redick says, looking back at the event a week later: "He told me, 'If you're around at the 11th pick, I know where you're going.'" But the draft has such a history of trading picks and making last-second deals that even a sure thing seems iffy.

Sure enough, Redick's been hearing the possibility of Seattle being a wild card and picking him early. But not as early as his buddy Adam Morrison, signature mustache and all, who gets picked third by the Charlotte Bobcats. Though they were Co-Players of the Year, that seems to be where the equal evaluation ends. Redick will still wait a while for his name to be called—and it's enough time for doubt to set in. The analysts have already cast a shred of insecurity in his mind, saying everything from "Redick will never be a regular starter in the NBA" to "He's a complete bust and a noncontributor."

The draft is up to the 10th pick now, and with it, the Seattle Supersonics decide to stretch beyond the states, taking a kid from Senegal, an African country not much larger than New York City. One can only wonder about the journey he must have taken to find himself a lottery pick. Redick would wonder himself, except now it's the 11th pick—the one his agent told him to be ready for. He grows nervous. Really nervous. His little brother David, who's not so little that he won't be going to Marshall in the fall to play tight end, has another concern—one other than his tie: "So when they call your name, should we go for the chest bump, fists, or a high five?" Redick busts out laughing and so does his brother. David Stern moves to the podium and gets ready to announce the next pick—and he does it just the same way he announced Allen Iverson, Gary Payton, and David Robinson in years past. "With the 11th pick, the Orlando Magic take . . . J.J. Redick."

And there it is. In 10 words, a dream has been realized—from one big, happy family in Roanoke, to an elite college team, to that select athletic family known as the NBA. Redick ends up embracing his brother in lieu of the chest bump, and now he and his parents can start to celebrate. Even with the DUI, injured back, and analyst negativity, Redick can still say only 10 players were thought to be better for the NBA than he.

Sitting in a restaurant with friends and family later that night, Redick finally gets the chance to reflect on the day. "The nervousness, anticipation, and uncertainty were gone, and I could finally relax," he says. "It was a moment where my family could laugh about things. I realized that as long as my parents tell me they're proud of me and love me, that's what's most important."

BACK AT CAMERON

The perfect finish to all that's happened to Redick would be for him to stop mid-dribble and drop a three-pointer down on one of his new teammates in summer league. But he can't. His back injury means more rehab, so now all he can do is watch his team and five others do battle in Orlando as the team prepares for the upcoming season. "It's mostly rookies and second-year players who show up to this," Redick says. "I hate only being able to watch." Jameer Nelson, who saw his points per game go from single digits to nearly 15 in his second year last season, goofs around with Redick to help keep him loose. "It's been helpful to at least talk with my teammates and my new coach," Redick says. "I hear he runs tough practices and gets in players' faces. He seems like my coach at Duke—that means we'll get along well."

In fact, his old coach has just cut Adam Morrison from the USA Men's Basketball tryouts, something Redick would've been a part of if not for his back. "You have no idea how much it hurts not to have a chance to go up against Dwyane Wade," he says. "That's the kind of experience I've been waiting for my whole life."

But despite the rehab, Redick confides that maybe he didn't stay off the court completely. Soon after the draft, he found himself back at the place where he was first discovered: Cameron Indoor Stadium, home of the Blue Devils. Although his back was still ailing and his doctors told him not to, Redick couldn't help but shoot a jumper or two. Or 20. "There's not really a place I don't like to shoot from," he says. "But just a little left of the top of the key is my favorite spot." And as he stood there knocking down treys, he started thinking about what Duke meant to him and how far he'd come.

"This is really the place where I grew up and learned the most about myself," he says. "When I was 7 and [Christian] Laettner hit that shot to knock Kentucky out of the tournament, I remember turning to my parents and saying I was going to play for Duke. And now I know that if I could play for a school like this and make the NBA, then there's no reason to think I can't be a great player and maybe even win a championship."

And with that, Redick grabs the ball and heads back to the three-point line for one last shot on his old turf. It's a small and private moment. But when you look at a person's life, it's amazing how they all add up. 🏀

