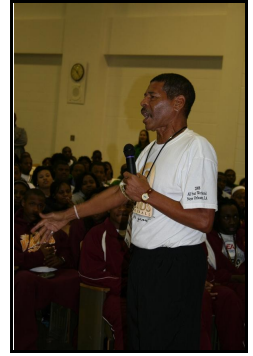


CHAMPIONS 4 CHAMPIONS



Over the years, Wali Jones has developed a passion for motivating countless numbers of kids to stay in school and develop a great love of learning.

The Community Affairs Liaison for the NBA's Miami HEAT spends almost every day traveling to different area schools to help students realize their dreams through his "Shoot for the Stars" program, which combines motivational speeches and basketball clinics designed to teach kids problem-solving, goal-setting, communication and team development skills.

His messages are simple: "Do the best that you can do," and "kids don't fail; plans fail."

They might be concepts that children have heard before, but it's the way that Jones delivers his messages and instills them in our youth that is so impressive to see. He uses his background in educational psychology to captivate students and at the same time deliver his points.

But, as the former basketball star admits, having an NBA ring and the backing of two professional sports teams like the HEAT and SOL doesn't hurt either. As he explains, the children like to partake in "selective listening" and are more likely to lend their ears thanks to the prospect of attaining HEAT and SOL tickets and memorabilia, as well as the opportunity of meeting a player.

"It's that identification with the professional athletes that lends credibility to what we do," Jones explained.

And his dedication is so intense that it's hard to believe he once devoted his life to anything other than this. A 10-year NBA veteran, Jones was a member of the storied World Champion 1967 Philadelphia 76ers, along with teammate Wilt Chamberlain. But even while spending his days on the hardwood, Jones always found the time to venture into the community during his professional career and reach out to those in need.

"Even when I was a player, I always had some job to do in the community," said Jones, whose love of social service blossomed as a student at Villanova University. "It gave me an opportunity to see how I could make a living after basketball and to see what I could do to help."

And at the end of his professional career – a time when athletes tend to delve into a more financially motivated line of business – Jones took a different turn and continued on the path of education and inspiration. He furthered his studies in child psychology, counseling and human development and then spent seven years working for the Federal Government and the Department of Education as a Human Development Trainer at the Center for Educational Development in San Antonio, Texas. Supervising a 10-state region and over 400 school districts, Jones was in charge of educating teachers in the fields of classroom management and teaching techniques.