

Athletes and fans refresh memories at autograph session

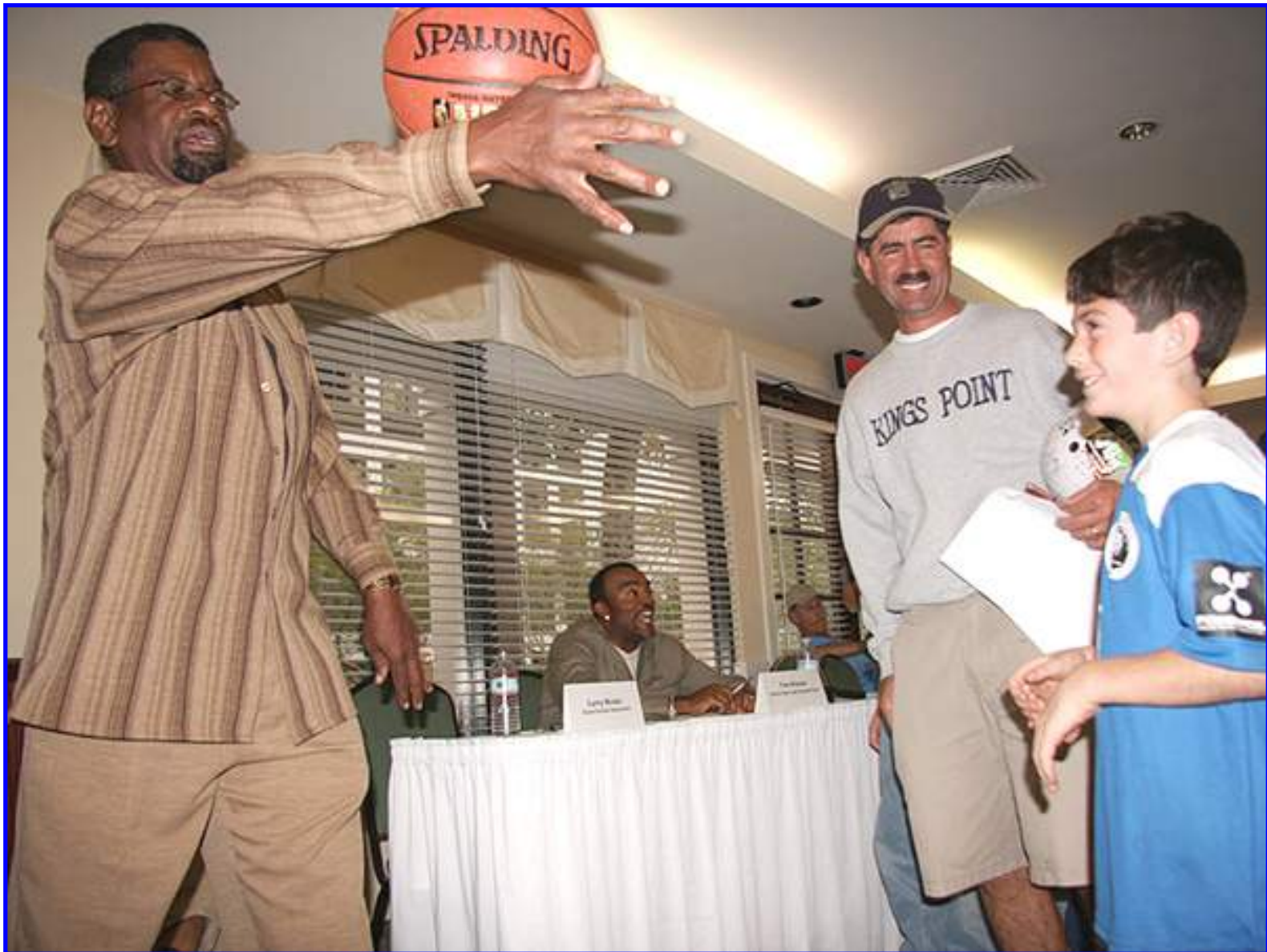


Photo by Brandon Sneed

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Former Harlem Globetrotter Larry "Gator" Rivers mesmerizes Bob Maslak as his father Chris looks on.

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Sports fans of all ages filed through the Landfall Park Hampton Inn and Suites lobby Saturday afternoon for the autograph session of the annual Willie Stargell Foundation celebrity golf tournament. They carried everything from baseball bats to basketballs to books about the war in Afghanistan.

“I just love baseball,” said Wes Holland, 22, who came out with his father Mark and brother Jason for the second straight year. “So to hear stories about their past and all that is awesome.”

Holland talked with former all-star pitcher Dave Stewart, the stare-batters-down Oakland A’s pitcher from the late 80s, and his strikeout of Wade Boggs in second inning of the first game of the 1988 playoffs. Boggs hadn’t struck out in his previous 32 at-bats against Stewart.

“Oh, man, it was a terrible pitch,” Stewart told Holland.

“That was pretty cool,” said Holland of speaking with Stewart.

“These guys are all great,” said Chris Maslak, whose son Bob was goofing around with former Pittsburg Pirate Tony Womack. “They all have good attitudes, they’re friendly.”

Womack was trying on Bob’s bike helmet before signing it, asking Bob, “This work well? You hit your head yet?”

Donald Hucks, 49, a long-time sports fan and baseball enthusiast, had Al Oliver, also a former all-star with the Pirates, cracking up as they joked about the huge divot Dave Parker, Oliver’s old teammate, ripped from the earth during last year’s tournament.

“I mean, dirt just flew everywhere,” Hucks recalled as Oliver guffawed.

It was odd to see Hucks, a self-proclaimed autograph obsessive, pass by Womack, a former all-star second baseman, but then Holland explained, “I didn’t get his today because I got it 20 years ago. I remember when he actually played here against the Wilmington Roosters.”

Womack was just in AA ball back then.

Sitting beside Womack was Larry “Gator” Rivers, a former Harlem Globetrotter who provided entertainment throughout the session. He was spinning basketballs off everything from his finger to his back to his shoulders to other guys’ and girls’ fingers.

“He can do anything with a ball,” said Randy Reeves, whose son Kyle brought along friends Ryan Spurney and Walker Ballard. Ballard had Rivers sign a basketball already signed by Globetrotters legend Meadowlark Lemon.

“Spin this,” said music producer James Arceneaux, tossing Rivers a football. Rivers spun it around then

flicked it at Arceneaux's feet.

Both men laughed.

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