



Tales from the Memphis Grizzlies Hardwood

Ron Higgins

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The Grizzlies are the NBA's version of Extreme Makeover. Born in Vancouver, the franchise was the worst in the NBA. No free agent ever wanted to play there. It was like being in a witness protection program. But when Chicago businessman Michael Heisley bought the team, he soon realized he had to get to a market where the franchise was the king, and that there was a plan in place to build a winner.

He stumbled onto Memphis, a Southern city rich in college and high school basketball history; a city that, aside from football teams in the old WFL and USFL, had never had a sports franchise in any major pro-sports league. After years of chasing NFL expansion franchises, it was a complete shock that, in a matter of three months in the spring and summer of 2001, the Grizzlies decided to move to Memphis.

And after that first losing season in Memphis, Heisley got serious. He did the unthinkable by persuading former Lakers general manager Jerry West to come to Memphis. West, interested by the challenge of building a winner out of the NBA's worst franchise, took the job.

He soon hired 70-year-old Hubie Brown, one of the NBA's greatest teachers, as coach. A year later, the Grizzlies were in the playoffs, Brown was the league's Coach of the Year, and the city had fallen in love with an old-school team built on the principles of unselfish team play. Now that grand design has transformed into a successful tradition. Mike Fratello took over for Brown when he resigned in 2004, and he's continued the Grizzlies' winning ways with the help of key players such as Pau Gasol and Mike Miller.

Tales from the Memphis Grizzlies is the perfect companion for any true Grizzlies fan or newcomers to Memphis basketball. In these pages, you will meet the players, coaches, and fans who have carried this franchise from Vancouver to Memphis and established a lasting franchise in NBA history.

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