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Global outreach

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By the time 7-5 Yao Ming of China arrived in the United States last summer to pursue a career in the National Basketball Association, he was already well acquainted with Kim Bohuny.

That's because Bohuny, a 1984 Furman graduate, serves as the NBA's vice president for international basketball operations, and part of her job is to make sure that international players who come into the league are prepared to handle the social and cultural challenges they are likely to face.

This is no small task, considering that approximately 20 percent of the players in the NBA hail from outside the United States. Bohuny expects another 15 or 16 foreign players to join the league for the 2003-04 season, which means her job is only going to become more important.

"My work with the players begins after they are drafted," she says. "I get together with the players and their families and help coordinate every facet of their careers. We want to help make that transitional period as smooth as possible."

But working with international players is only part of Bohuny's duties with the NBA. She also manages the league's relationship with the global basketball community, which includes FIBA, the governing body for international basketball, and USA Basketball, the organization responsible for fielding the men's and women's national teams that participate in the Olympics and World Championships.

When Bohuny graduated from Furman nearly 20 years ago, she never imagined that she would play such an integral role in the international basketball community. But she isn't all that surprised that she has had a career in sports.

She came to Furman from Franklin Lakes, N.J., and majored in health and exercise science with an emphasis in sports management. She was a member of the Lady Paladin golf team but never did get to travel with a squad that included All-America Dottie Pepper.

"My whole life, it seemed like I was either watching or playing sports, so it seemed natural that I should do something related to sports after college," says Bohuny.

Following graduation, she had a six-month internship at CNN Sports in Atlanta. She then went to TBS, where

she worked on the Goodwill Games, and then it was on to TNT Sports for a few more years. Bohuny joined the NBA in 1990 as manager of international events.

"My job was to help run a few world events, establish relationships with other leagues around the world, and deal with the 13 or 14 international players who were in the league at that time," she says. "The league was just beginning to go global."

And the more global the NBA became, the more responsibility Bohuny was given. She became director of player and basketball development in 1996 and was named vice president in 2000. During her time in the NBA, she has traveled to more than 60 countries and tried to communicate in many more languages than she knows to speak.

"I studied Russian but speak it very poorly," she says. "Fortunately, English is the language of basketball, and I can work with translators if need be."

There is no question that international players have made and will continue to make a huge impact in the NBA. In addition to 2001-02 Rookie of the Year Pau Gasol of Spain, NBA rosters include 2003 All-Stars Ming, Dirk Nowitzki (Germany), Zydrunas Ilgauskas (Lithuania), Steve Nash (Canada) and Peja Stojakovic (Serbia and Montenegro). Ming, of course, was the No. 1 pick of the Houston Rockets in last year's

draft and has already become a marketing phenomenon in America.

"My first encounter with Yao was to oversee a workout with him in Chicago, where the league wanted to showcase his skills," Bohuny says. "He is a fantastic person. It's just amazing how he responded to the pressures of his first year in the league, both on and off the court."

So the next time you see an international player making his mark in the NBA and he appears to be right at home in his new surroundings, you'll know that Bohuny has done her part to pave the way for his success.

"I feel very blessed to be able to come in every day and do something I love," she says. "I guess you can't ask for more than that."

— Vince Moore



Kim Bohuny with Hedo Turkoglu, the first Turkish-born player in NBA history.