

BASKETBALL

Blount doing a 'wonderful thing for children'

By Kelly Landy
STAFF WRITER

Boston Celtics starting center Mark Blount, at 7-foot, 250-pounds, is setting himself up to be a giant for South Florida youth.

"I think first and foremost, the kids need guidance," said Blount, who lived in Yonkers, N.Y. until age 9. As the years passed, he saw "all the crime and drugs," he said, move northward from the Bronx into Yonkers.

"Just the area I grew up in, seeing the needs, I started putting my efforts to help the kids," said Blount, who maintains a residence in West Boca.

To give back to the community, he founded the Mark Blount Foundation, based in Boca Raton. Blount, the foundation's president wants "to help kids decide at an early age what direction they want to go in life," he said. "I'm hands-on with everything—all the decisions. I control pretty much every aspect."

Boca Raton residents Lisa Macci, Esq. and Alan Woolf, Esq. attended the pre-reception Thursday at Morton's Steakhouse in Boca Raton for the foundation's black tie affair on July 30.

"There are a lot of professional athletes in the area and so few of them actually help out the community," Macci said. "It's a refreshing change for Boca. I think it's a wonderful thing he's doing for the children."

Blount was selected in the second round of the NBA draft by the Seattle SuperSonics in 1997, but was cut. He played in the Continental Basketball Association for a couple of years until he got the call from Boston four years ago. After being cut six times from professional basketball teams, Blount, 28, knows first-hand what it feels like to be rejected. He didn't give up and ended up signing a \$41 million, six-year contract Wednesday with

the Celtics.

"If it wasn't for my drive, and proving to people I belonged in the NBA [I wouldn't be where I am today]," Blount said. "A lot of [young] people don't have that drive. I want to help them. A lot of kids wait until they're 18, 19 years old to decide what direction in life they want to go. I had several people who helped me along. I don't think I would be in the situation I am now if it wasn't for the help I received."

Getting started

Project Point is the foundation's main emphasis.

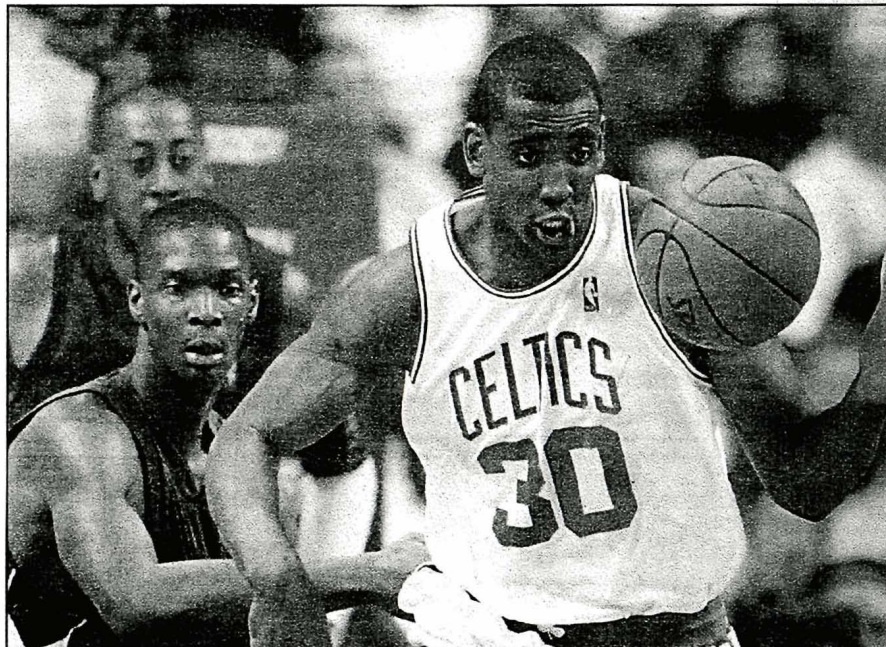
"Project Point is to try to teach the kids, and to point them into the right direction," Blount said.

July 30 marks the date of the First Annual Black Tie Gala Fundraising Dinner at the Westin Diplomat Resort and Spa in Hollywood. The festivities will conclude with the First Annual Mark Blount Invitational Golf Tournament at the Diplomat Country Club and Spa in Hallandale Beach on July 31.

"I'd love the people in the community to come out to support me and the goals of the foundation," Blount said. "It's going to be great for everyone."

The proceeds from both events will be used to underwrite the cost of the goals of the Mark Blount Foundation, which aims to act as a mentor to children ages 11 to 18. Jeremy Schaap from ESPN, the current Miss Florida and Blount are scheduled to host the evening that will include a silent auction, Porsche Boxster and Lexus SUV giveaways, and a fashion show. Walter McCarty from the Celtics and Sam Odele, an actor from the movie "Amistad" and "Tears of the Sun," are on the guest list.

"We like getting behind good charities," said Eric Kessler, a Lexus of Palm Beach representa-



ASSOCIATED PRESS

The Boston Celtics' Mark Blount (30) chases a loose ball after stripping it from Toronto's Chris Bosh, left, during a game in Toronto, Feb. 29. Blount, who lives in Boca Raton, is hosting a three-day basketball/life skills camp at the Athletic Club of Boca Raton, July 28-30.

ative. "Mark Blount is a Lexus owner. It's a privilege to be associated with his charity. It's always a pleasure to help kids in the area and give back to the community."

At the pre-reception dinner at least one attendee made the minimum donation of \$1,000 to eligible to win the Porsche.

"Florida is one of the largest nonprofit states in the country," said Keith Jacobs, chief operating officer of the Mark Blount Foundation, which began in August 2003. "It's important the community has a chance to meet him. These events allow the public to meet Mark personally and to understand the mission of the foundation."

Since the launch in August, Blount has hosted a couple of

smaller fundraisers in Boston, but this is the big event to get things started. Jacobs said the goal is to raise at least \$100,000.

"Hopefully one day we will build our own facility," Jacobs said.

For now, the foundation will utilize existing facilities for their programs in addition to working with local agencies such as the Wayne Barton Study Center.

"Mark's nickname in the NBA is 'Big Basics,'" Jacobs said.

The organization's "Stick With The Basics" motto emphasizes the underlying principles of basic life skills to enable individuals to realize their full potential. The four components of the curriculum are self-discovery to help kids learn who they are and what they're good at, mind mapping to

learn how they think, social skills to understand and appreciate cultures and accept differences and life planning to better understand where their gifts lie.

"I've lived in the Palm Beach County area for six years and look forward to retiring here," Blount said. "I'm hoping the initiatives of the Mark Blount Foundation will help make South Florida a better place to live for all youth."

The foundation is also hosting a three-day summer basketball/life skills training camp, for boys and girls ages 8 to 18. The camp will take place July 28-30 at the Athletic Club of Boca Raton.

For more information, call (561) 237-3020 or go to www.markblountfoundation.org.

Heat's Jones is reunited with his biggest critic - Shaq