

Former Dallas Mavericks summer league player embodying hope

As Ray Johnston rebounds from cancer, others benefit

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One day at basketball practice, Ray Johnston realized that most of his select high school players had skills, but few had plans.

For some of his players and most anywhere, basketball would not be a way out. So Johnston figured it was up to him to find a way for a few.

His solution: Working through the Heroes Organization and Foundation, Johnston will host the "Prepare for College Fair" on Saturday at Gilley's from 9 a.m. to noon.

A team of volunteers, corporate sponsors and representatives from SMU, Brookhaven College and the SAT college board will lead a hundred male high schoolers, mostly sophomores and juniors from Dallas ISD, through a hands-on seminar.

They'll learn how to apply for college, register for the SAT and, in a nice practical touch, practice interviewing for jobs.

And if it sounds like a tough assignment, helping at-risk inner-city kids find a future, then you don't know Ray Johnston.

Maybe you remember his story, though: Three years ago, doctors wouldn't have given you much for his future. A former Alabama point guard and member of the Mavericks' summer league team, Johnston lapsed into a coma after being diagnosed with a rare, aggressive form of leukemia.

And that was maybe the least of it: kidney failure, heart fibrillation, seizures, blood clots, pneumonia. Two, maybe three times, he was as good as dead.

Even when he woke up after *two months* in a coma, a miracle at that, his recovery was far from over.

Twice since his original diagnosis, the cancer has come back. When it returned in December, doctors told Johnston it was time to call in the cavalry.

On Feb. 28, he underwent a bone marrow transplant. Doctors set 100 days as a goal.

Make it that long without any recurrence, they told him, and he had a decent shot at making it.

Now on Day 256, Johnston marks his progress in increments. He's working out now and no longer needs a cane.

Next on his list: He'd like to meet the donor that made the transplant possible.

"I'm hoping he has four season tickets to the Mavs," he jokes.

Johnston doesn't have any trouble getting tickets. He's practically the team's mascot.

Now 28, he continues to inspire the Mavs and anyone else privileged enough to witness his recovery. In the course of

his amazing story, he's lost seven toes, his spleen and his ability to lead a fast break.

But not his hope. He still has that, for himself as well as underprivileged basketball players.

The Heroes Foundation found the right guy to run its basketball operation. Johnston can teach them basketball – four will sign national letters of intent – and he offers a path to a better future.

Of course, it's up to the players to take it. But it helps when you know who you can follow.

PREPARE FOR COLLEGE FAIR

When: Saturday from 9 a.m. to noon

Where: Gilley's, 1135 S. Lamar, Dallas

Phone: 214-421-2021

Sponsors: Neiman Marcus, SMU, Brookhaven, SAT college board

Who: 100 male high school students

A LA CARTE

■ **Dirk Nowitzki** still hasn't gotten over his Warriors phobia, which Mavs fans should simply learn to live with. Yes, he made some key shots. But he can't carry Dallas against Golden State. Not like **Baron Davis** shoulders the Warriors against the Mavs. Good news: **Jason Terry** continues to excel off the bench, **Brandon Bass** brings an edge, and the Warriors, who don't get those kinds of games from Davis every night, will have a hard time making the playoffs. Another thing: Did you catch Golden State at the line? Among playoff contenders, only teams with **Tim Duncan**, **LeBron James** or **Dwyane Wade** get away with that. ...

■ In fining **T.O.** \$10,000 for bringing his monogrammed towels on the field, the NFL looks petty. But consistent. Owens should quit acting surprised. ...

■ Don't know about you, but the idea of **Coco Crisp** roaming center in Arlington doesn't do much for me. When you're not getting power from traditional positions, i.e., corner outfielders, you must make up for it elsewhere. One more time: **Torii Hunter** is the answer in center, offensively and defensively. Pay the man. ...

■ Good idea to make MLB coaches wear helmets on the field. Either that, or give them gloves. Now if we can just get the loiterers off the field during batting practice. ...

■ Reader **Don Garrett** agrees with last week's complaint about sad state of Texas football in what was formerly Division I-A and I-AA. But he notes that the state's Division II football may be the best in decades with West Texas A&M ranked fourth and Tarleton State, Abilene Christian and Midwestern State also in Top 25. Special note on West Texas' **Don Carthel**: He's no kid anymore, you'd have to pry him out of Canyon and, yes, it's Division II. But a Texas school looking for a good coach could do worse. ...

■ Congratulations to **Mike Modano** for breaking the American record, but only in the NHL would a sport rank records by nationality. Kind of screams that we're playing someone else's sport, which might help explain the ratings. ...

■ My Heisman vote? Haven't seen a football player as good as **Darren McFadden** since, well, **Vince Young**. Never mind the 43 yards against Auburn, which were the fault of his offense, not his performance. At least **Houston Nutt** let him operate out of the aptly named WildHog formation against South Carolina. No team should have *two* running

backs as good as McFadden and **Felix Jones**

■ Gardner-Webb's stunning romp over Kentucky wasn't as big as Appalachian State's upset of Michigan, but the Wildcats won't be able to tell the difference by the time **Billy Gillispie** gets through with them. ...

■ If plans proceed to demolish the Orange Bowl this winter, you can buy one of its urinals at auction. Think I'll just use a Cotton Bowl restroom instead.