

Pinoy tries out for NBA D League

by JOSEPH PIMENTEL
AJPress

LOS ANGELES—The NBA season may be over but there's plenty of action in the basketball hardwood.

Pinoy basketball player Japeth Aguilar, a former Ateneo Blue Eagle basketball player, is taking his first steps to making it in the NBA.

More than 200 prospects gathered at a pre-draft for the NBA Development league in Hawthorne last weekend including Aguilar, a 22-year-old from Pampanga, Philippines.

"This is really an opportunity for the players to come to one

location in front of all our coaches, a lot of our scouts, league office people who'll eventually sign the players to contracts, and an opportunity for them to showcase their skills to show what they can possibly do in the NBA D-League level," said Chris Alpert, Vice President of Basketball Operations and Player Personnel for the NBA Development League.

The NBA D-League has produced a number of players to the NBA. Most notably, Shannon Brown of the World Champion Los Angeles Lakers was a member of three D-League teams before being called up. Former LA Clippers Bobby Simmons went from D-League player to winning the NBA's Most Improved Player award in 2005.

Aguilar said that going through the D-League is a great way to get into the NBA.

"This experience is really good," added Aguilar to the *Asian Journal*. "You get a chance to compete with other people trying to make it to the next level too. You know they are going to give it their best. You can see how you compare yourself with them."

At 6'10", Aguilar has a big chance on making it to the NBA. The former Ateneo basketball star became the first Philippine born player to sign a Division I scholarship when he accepted a basketball scholarship to Western Kentucky University (WKU) two years ago.

Now, he's hoping to be the first Philippine born player to make in the league.

Coming out of the Philippines, a lot of hype followed him to the US. However, nagging injuries while at WKU prevented him from fulfilling his potential.

Despite the lack of production in college, NBA scouts in attendance at the pre-draft camp noticed the lanky Filipino game.

"He's got a lot of potential," said Hernando Planells, Scout for the Director of Scouting Services for the NBA Marty Blake. "Athletically, he can run with the best big mans out there. He's long, athletic. He's great."

Planells added, "Athleticism is the key to the game. Whether it's international or the NBA so I think he has the potential to do some damage."

Aguilar's coach during the two-day tryout was also impressed with the Filipino. However, he referred Aguilar as a bit of a 'tweener,' a player who is able to play two positions, but is not ideally suited to play either.

"I liked that he's long," said Ben MacDonald, Assistant Coach for the Eerie Bayhawks of the NBA D-League. "He can run the court well for a guy his size. He has good hands. He finishes around the basket pretty well. He just needs to find his game."

MacDonald explained that although Aguilar has the height of a big power forward or small center, that he's better suited as a small forward.

"He needs to find what kind of post moves he's able to make. He needs to make that outside 15 to 18 foot shot on a more consistent basis," MacDonald said. "I think what happened to him is that because he's so tall other coaches have made him into a center. I think he's better suited as a small forward especially in the NBA. And if he does play small forward, he needs better defensive skills because he'll be guarding guys like Kobe Bryant."

MacDonald added that Aguilar should pattern his game after current Detroit Piston player Rasheed Wallace. MacDonald said that Wallace has great post moves and can make outside jump shots.



Aguilar said that his experience during the pre-draft camp was great. He also said that it's going to be tough.

"It's going to be hard but it's not impossible," said Aguilar. "This is just a stepping-stone. I've already spoken to a lot of



AJPress photos by Joseph Pimentel

teams. Hopefully, I can do well."

Aguilar knows that he has a whole nation rooting for him. He said that he's thankful for being able to be in this position.

"Thank you to all the supporters out there," he said. "Hopefully, I can achieve my goals and people will recognize the Philippines."

Aguilar will fly home to the Philippines this week. He'll join the Philippine National team that will compete in the Jones Cup and the FIBA Asia Men's basketball championships in China.

Japeth Aguilar, is the son of former PBA star Peter Aguilar.

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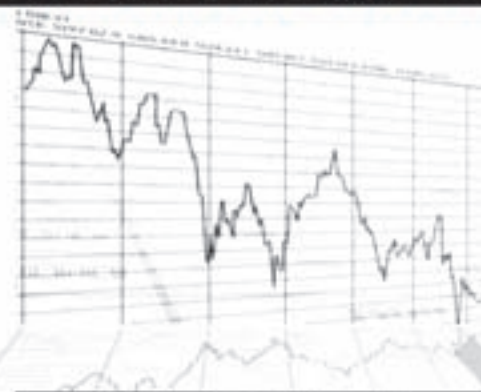
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