

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



AJPress Photo by Joseph Pimentel

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 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. ■

Fil-Ams Protest GMA's Visit

by JOSEPH PIMENTEL
AJPress

LOS ANGELES—THEIR chants from the street could be heard from inside the Sheraton Hotel.

Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo made a brief visit to Los Angeles and held a breakfast event at the Sheraton Hotel last Saturday.

And demonstrators from across Southern California made their voices heard.

Chanting, "What do you really want? What do you really, really want? Justice!" a group of about 20 Filipinos gathered outside the Sheraton protesting the president's visit.

"We came here today to tell Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo that we don't approve of her con-ass (Constituent Assembly) and human rights violations," said Kuusela Hilo, vice chairperson for Bayan USA.

"It's important for us to be here because we part of the Filipino people even though we are overseas," she added. "We support the country's economy but most importantly, we support the country and the movement to keep the country a national democracy. We don't want charter change."

A few weeks ago, the Philippine House of Representatives passed a controversial resolution 1109, a Charter change measure seeking to convene Congress into a constituent assembly.

Senate and House leaders are planning to vote on the issue next month.

Meanwhile, other groups have set a Manila-wide protest rally on June 30 to start the countdown to President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's last year in office, according to the *Inquirer.net*. ■

APIAVOTE Statement on Supreme Court decision to leave Voting Rights Act and Key Anti-Discriminatory Provision intact

WASHINGTON, DC—The United States Supreme Court on Monday handed down a decision that preserves the Voting Rights Act, effectively avoiding the constitutionality question of Section 5, a key provision which requires certain states and jurisdictions to apply to a federal agency or court for changes to their voting processes, and expanding the ability of political subdivisions to seek "bailout" from Section 5's preclearance requirements.

Monday's decision is not necessarily a decisive victory, as the justices almost unanimously united (8-1) to avoid the question of Section 5's constitutionality.

Chief Justice John Roberts stated in his opinion that the ruling did not definitively give an answer to whether Section 5 is relevant today. The Court's lone dissenter, Justice Clarence Thomas, asserted

the unconstitutionality of Section 5, stating that the "violence, intimidation and subterfuge" that caused the passage of Section 5 no longer exists.

The decision was handed down via a limited ruling in the case filed by the Northwest Austin Municipality District in Texas, in which they challenged the constitutionality of Section 5's "preclearance" requirement, and argued that small districts such as theirs should be exempt from the requirement, since smaller districts do not fall under the definition of "political subdivision" that could be exempt from the preclearance requirement as stated by the Act.

The Voting Rights Act continues to play a key role in protecting voting right for all Americans. Many see the VRA as outdated and antiquated, but in Asian

American Pacific Islander and minority communities, barriers to voting and discrimination at the polls still occur.

Texas is one of the states fully covered by Section 5 (Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Texas and Virginia are also fully covered), and is still a state at which AAPIs experience voting obstacles and discrimination, according to the Asian American Justice Center.

Asian Pacific Islander American Vote (APIAVote) is a national non-partisan, nonprofit organization that encourages and promotes civic participation of Asian Pacific Islander Americans in the electoral and public policy processes at the national, state and local levels. For more information, please visit www.apia.vote.org. ■

Climate bill showdown: Obama, Dems pressing hard

WASHINGTON—President Barack Obama pushed urgently for passage of legislation to confront global warming, billing it as a job-creating machine rather than the costly "job killer" Republicans denounced. He telephoning wavering Democrats on the eve of what could be a historic House vote.

Speaking in the Rose Garden at the White House, Obama said Washington must not miss the opportunity to work on cleaning the air, creating new "green" energy jobs and moving the nation away from its reliance on fossil fuels such as oil, coal and natural gas.

The White House appeared concerned that momentum for the bill was slipping, though White House press secretary Robert Gibbs said that when it came time for a House showdown, "I'd bet on the president."

Democratic leaders scurried to line up enough votes to get the bill passed. They enlisted former Vice President Al Gore, the country's most prominent voice on the urgency of addressing climate change, to make phone calls to wary lawmakers—including some who believe the House bill was too weak rather than too strong.

House Republicans for weeks have maintained a drumbeat against the legislation, calling it a massive energy tax on every American and a "job killer" because it will force higher prices on electricity, gasoline and other energy sources as the economy shifts from cheaper fossil fuels, or as companies and utilities are forced to buy pollution allowances.

Obama as well as House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., sought to counter that argument. (AP)

Overseas Filipino voters exceed 100,000 mark

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21,386, then by Middle East and Africa at 18,627, then Europe at 12,618, the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration offices at 13, 588, the Ninoy Aquino International Airport at 8,757, and the Commission on Filipinos Overseas at 729.

The same report shows that the top ten countries in terms of OAV registrants are: the United States of America with 17,262; China with 11,250; United Arab Emirates with 7,297; Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with 5,176; Singapore with 4,577; Taiwan with 4,136; United Kingdom with 4,066; Canada with 4,009; Japan with 3,510; and Italy with 2,799.

Seguis noted that 27,000 Filipinos set to leave for abroad or who are here on vacation have availed of the OAV registration service at the POEA, NAIA, and CFO.

"We are calling on all Filipinos

overseas and those who are about to leave the country to work abroad to register as absentee voters so they can exercise their right to vote in the 2010 presidential elections," he said.

Seguis said his office is in touch with different posts and have called on every embassy and consulate to intensify its campaign on absentee voting registration.

The Philippine consulate general in Hong Kong has reported the highest number of registrants at 10,455 followed by the Philippine consulate general in Los Angeles, California with 6,534 registrants.

In the Middle East, 5,571 Filipinos in Dubai have registered with the Philippine consulate general thus taking the number one spot among the different posts in the said region.

The Philippine embassy in London leads the different posts in Europe with 4,066 registrants.

According to the OAVS, registration activities are ongoing in all 93 foreign service Posts, three Manila Economic and Cultural Offices (MECO), and one Philippine Overseas Labor Office (POLO).

A Memorandum of Agreement between the DFA-OAVS, the Commission on Filipinos Overseas, and the Commission on Elections-Committee on Overseas Absentee Voting was signed on June 4 to increase the participation of overseas Filipinos to register as absentee voters. These include Filipino permanent migrants or permanent residents abroad, Filipinos overseas who have become citizens of other countries, and Filipino spouses and fiancées of foreign nationals leaving the country. (*Inquirer.net*)

Key senator says \$1 trillion health bill possible

WASHINGTON—With lawmakers trying to crunch the numbers on a \$1 trillion health care overhaul, President Barack Obama is leaving the door open to a new tax on employer-provided health care benefits.

Senior senators said Wednesday, June 24 the benefits tax could be essential for the complex plan to be fully financed.

"I don't want to prejudge what they're doing," Obama said, referring to proposals in the Senate to tax workers who get expensive insurance policies. Obama, who campaigned against the tax when he ran for president, drew a quick rebuff from organized labor.

For Obama, the health care debate got personal during an ABC News town hall at the White House on Wednesday. The prime-time program was the latest in a string of events designed to build public support for his plan to slow the rise in health care costs and expand coverage to the nearly 50 million uninsured.

Dr. Orrin Devinsky, a neurologist at the New York University Langone Medical Center, challenged Obama: What if the president's wife and daughters got sick? Would Obama promise that they would get only the services allowed under a new government insurance plan he's proposing?

Obama wouldn't bite.

If "it's my family member, if it's my wife, if it's my children, if it's my grandmother, I always want them to get the very best care," Obama said.

The administration and its allies pushed for a prominent display of progress in the Senate before Congress begins a weeklong vacation Friday, June 26.

Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus, D-Mont., labored in a series of meetings to produce at least an outline of legislation that could command bipartisan support. Of the five House and Senate committees working on a health care overhaul, Finance is the only one that appears to have a chance at such an agreement.

Baucus appeared especially eager to show progress before the exodus from the Capitol begins.

Several officials said he was negotiating with representatives of the nation's hospitals, hoping to conclude an agreement that would build on an \$80 billion weekend deal with the pharmaceutical industry.

Hospitals were being asked to accept a reduction of roughly \$155 billion over the next decade in fees they are promised under government programs such as Medicare and Medicaid, according to numerous officials. (AP)



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