

A sports interview with Travis Bice

By Michael Clayton
YELLIN' REBEL

Editor's note: Staff writer Michael Clayton interviewed Runnin' Rebel basketball player Travis Duane Bice. Bice is a sophomore.

Yellin' Rebel: How much time do you give to the thought of the NBA?

Bice: Not much really Mike. At this point I don't think I'm really good enough to get into the NBA. All I worry about is working as hard as I can to be as good as I can. If the NBA comes in, then hey, that's fine...if it doesn't, then that's fine too. If I get the opportunity to play overseas, then fantastic. If not, then I'm going to just move on and concentrate my efforts into another area...

YR: Such as?

Bice: [confidently] Law School. I know that I have the ability to get into a Law school and to graduate from it.

YR: When you were young was the NBA a fantasy of yours?

Bice: Oh definitely! I used to picture myself playing with other guys in college and in the NBA...Kareem, Irving—I was big Julius Irving fan. When I was young I also would fantasize about going to the Final Four. [smiles and points to the NCAA National Championship ring on his finger] Now that's a dream come true. So you never know what's gonna happen.

YR: What's your biggest weakness as a basketball player?

Bice: Just my size. I've always been so skinny that it's been easy for guys to hold me; it's hard for me to hold them. I definitely get bounced around. I've gotten that since I've been here. You get used to it. Basketball is a lot more physical than a lot of people have any idea of...I think it weeds a lot of guys out. You've got to learn to get tough real fast.

YR: Do the refs let a lot of things get by?

Bice: [grins] They've called a bunch of fouls on me, but I mean guys have knocked the #@% out of me...

YR: Has anyone ever elbowed you, and you thought that it was a malicious elbow, and you said to yourself, 'I'm getting this guy!'

Bice: Perris McCurty from Ball State. I'll never forget it. He smashed my ribs. They've been sore for a month.

YR: And you think it was on purpose?

Bice: [devilish] Yes, and I'd still like to get him!

YR: What's your strength?

Bice: Just shooting the ball. Ever since I was little I took a lot of pride in being a good shooter. I can shoot with the best of them.

I'm beyond being a three-point man. I'm a four-point man! [laughs] And I'm moving up...

YR: Who is Jerry Tarkanian?

Bice: Coach...man-n, I have so much respect for him. First of all, his record; you just can't compete with his record. Out of high school a lot of guys didn't want to give me a chance because of this and that, but Coach Tark said, 'Hey, you come out here and you're going to be on the team.' He put me on scholarship.

YR: But initially you were a walk-on? Some people feel shame with that status...

Bice: When I came here I had a purpose in mind. It wasn't just to make the team—I wanted to play. And I said I'm just gonna bust my ass. If I don't play the first year, then so what? If I don't play the second year, fine. But by the time of my third year I figured I'd be playing.

YR: What is Jerry Tarkanian to you besides the guy who made you feel good about coming to UNLV?

Bice: He's very, very, very basketball-oriented, basketball-minded. Sometimes he's hard to talk to. He's different from a lot of coaches. Other coaches will come up and ask you about your social life, but Coach isn't like that. He is just so into basketball.

He might blurt out a sentence that's not related to basketball then he'll get right back to basketball.

He'll go 'You look good. How much do you weigh?' But the one thing about Coach Tark is that he is a proven winner. He has a proven track record—that's Jerry Tarkanian to me. Just win, baby!

YR: He breathes basketball.

Bice: Worst than anybody I've ever seen in my life. A basketball addict!

YR: I only noticed three names in the men's section of the basketball section of the Department of Intercollegiate Athletics 11th Annual Student-Athlete Convocation. I know that one of the standards is a 3.0 gpa, and that another is a 12 credit load. Is that hard to do?

Bice: It's tremendously hard to do. This year I've had a terrible time because of so much illness. Plus we were really out on the road

a lot this year. Mike, school's been a strain for the last for weeks. I think that we averaged going to two classes, and missing three—that's the same as not going as far as I'm concerned. It turns out that you start going just to make sure that the instructor knows that you're making an effort to compensate. [emphatic] I mean, when you go to class, you don't know what the hell's going on...sometimes you sit there and wonder to yourself, *why am I here?* But still, you have to go. There are tutors that are provided for us. They can help you catch up if you're willing to work at it. You can get tutored in anything.

YR: Then you're saying it's a matter of personal initiative whether or not you're on that list, and the fact that you're on the list is a demonstration of your not being lazy?

Bice: That's hard for me to say, because I've always been an outstanding student. That just reflects in my habits now. I want to do well, and I want to graduate with a 3.0. Some of our other guys have probably had it a lot tougher in life than I've had. Some of the guys haven't had as much direction as far as schooling goes. But still, most of them are going to graduate anyway. There's no shame in graduating with, say, a 2.4. It's just not as widely publicized. I don't think that most normal students understand what's going on in the life of a student-athlete. We're out there in front of twenty thousand people, and sometimes more when you consider a TV audience when you're on a nationally televised game. You have to get ready upstairs for that. The night before a game can be the worst. You aren't able to concentrate on anything but what's in front of you.

YR: The butterflies (adrenaline)?

Bice: Oh yeah...before the game. Way before the game! All day... The average student doesn't have to put up with that. The average student can go to school, then go to work and not have his mind on work—the boss will never know it. You can fool the boss, but you can't fool the coach. I have to have my mind ready for practice 'cause I'm playing for time. I've got to be ready, and that takes concentration. Big time pressure!

YR: Are you self-conscious about being "The Skinniest Rebel?"

Bice: Nah-h. Not anymore. When I was younger I was really self-conscious about it, but now it

just rolls off my back when I hear somebody say it. I think that I've proved that I can play even at this weight. I was out a lot this year because of sickness, though.

YR: ...sick from what?

Bice: Mike, I got one damn virus after another—then chicken pox finally did me in...and that just led to pneumonia during the Final Four. Now they're gonna take my tonsils out. [emotional] What I'm saying is that I did really well, but I would have done a whole lot better if it weren't for illness. I was really disappointed after all the hard work I put in—ten years of work to get somewhere...I never missed one game. [Bice's face flushed red] You know, Mike, get there after all that time and just have someone kick your legs from under you...It's hard to take! Sometimes I would tell my Dad, 'Hey, I just don't know if it's worth it anymore.' Spend all that time to end up having that kind of shit happen to you. And then you never know what Tark's thinking...does he really know how sick I am? Yet what are you gonna do? This is the Final Four...what are you gonna do, just sit out just because you have pneumonia? I got into the NCAA's and was shooting 15 percent, before that I was shooting at 55 percent. My percentages were going down. And you know, Mike, you're only as good as your last game. People start questioning your ability."

YR: How did you interact with the NCAA during the investigations that went on here earlier in the academic year?

Bice: [grew silent] I think I should talk about it. I wasn't really investigated anyway.

YR: Are you close to anybody on the team?

Bice: We're all real close. It's real true when the press talks about how close—knit the team is.

YR: Do you all have any nicknames for each other that could be printed in the newspaper?

Bice: Nah... [laughs] I'm "T-Bice", Greg is "G", Hunt is "Nice"—simple stuff...

YR: Who's the team clown?

Bice: Ah man, without a doubt, hands down, it's Mo. Moses Scurry...Big Mo. He's just hilarious. That big grin... Man, we're just constantly ripping each other up. Mo makes me laugh so hard. The thing is it's so easy to make Mo laugh. You can go up to Mo and tell him the stupidest story you ever heard and he'll be down on the floor laughing his butt off.

YR: How much time do you put in the court during the off-season?

Bice: I tell ya' what: Last year I'd get up and shoot around seven in the morning for an hour, go to class, come back in the afternoon, lift weights for two hours, recover, then shoot for another hour—I mean hard. I'd run in the evening then go play for awhile around six in the evening. I was putting four to six hours a day. And I was trying to gain weight. I was putting away some serious calories.

YR: Most basketball players are self-conscious about their game. What is the thing that makes you most self-conscious other than your weight? What I mean is basketball players try to form an image, not a personality...

Bice: I'm most self-conscious about being labelled a shooter. Yes I can shoot good, but I don't want to be labelled "a shooter." Once you're labelled that way though it sticks on. Coaches label you that way. Your teammates label you that way. I mean, hell, I've been playing basketball since I was eight years old, and I think that I can do more than just stand around and shoot the dang ball. I mean what, I can't pass it? Can't dribble it? Can't drive to the basket? I get sick of hearing it—even on TV. 'Here comes the three-point shooter.' It's something I'm trying to get off of my back now. By the time I'm a senior I don't want to be labelled some bomber. You know, 'He only comes in when the zone is on. I just want to be able to play ball like I know that I can...

YR: If there were one thing about Tark that you could change what would it be?

Bice: [breaks into a wide grin] Give Travis Bice more playing time...that's about it, just play Trav.

YR: Should college athletes be paid more than the current amount they receive in the form of a monthly stipend designated for living expenses?

Bice: I think so. I think the way it's getting now the rules should be reassessed. There should be some kind of set salary.

YR: What's a good salary for a freshmen, and what's a good salary for a proven senior?

Bice: [chuckles] That's true. Is a Larry Johnson worth more than a Travis Bice? But seriously, there are these athletes who earn a lot of money for the school, so how could you look at them as being anything else but professional athletes. What