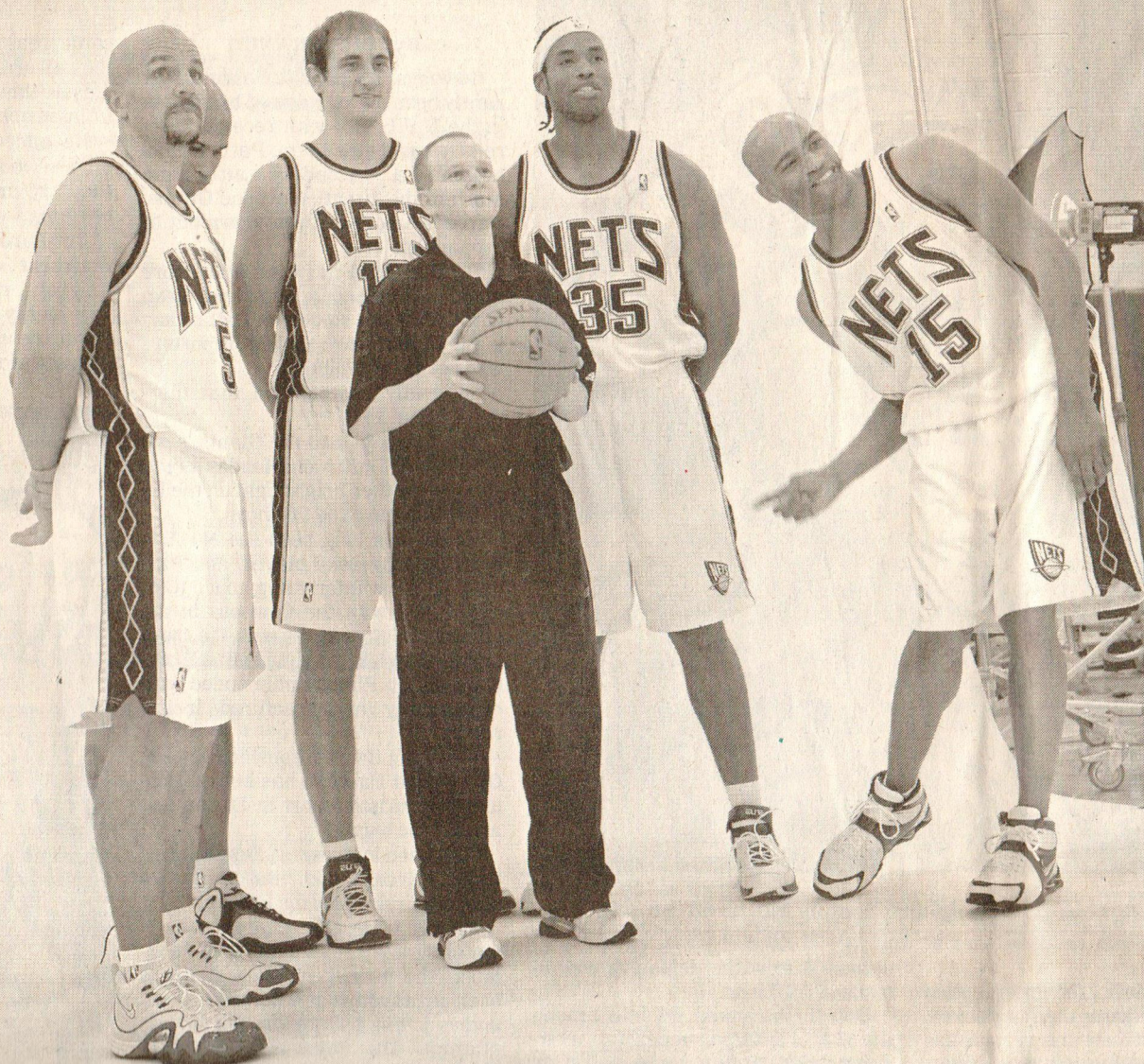


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## PRO BASKETBALL





Since becoming head coach two and a half seasons ago, Lawrence Frank has led the Nets to victory in 56.9 percent of their regular-season games.

# Some Can, Some Can't, Some Coach

## The Nets' Frank Has Prepared for His Job His Entire Life

By JOHN ELIGON

Long before he began trying to sell his philosophy to professional basketball players, Nets Coach Lawrence Frank used his creativity and persuasive power to make a fast buck.

As a 10-year-old boy in Teaneck, N.J., he decided to sell his oldest brother's broken bicycle. So he opened a telephone book and made random sales calls.

He found a potential buyer, but one obstacle remained: The woman was looking for a girl's bike for her daughter. Frank talked her into the boy's model and promised to service it, even though he had no clue how to fix a bike. Not to worry. He had his father, Gordon, repair it, and the sale was made.

"I have always felt with Lawrence that whatever he set his mind to, he would accomplish it," Frank's mother, Marilyn, said in a recent interview from their longtime family home in Teaneck.

The vision and intensity that Frank tapped as a child are the same qualities he works to instill in his team as a 36-year-old man. He spends most of his time at the Nets' practice center in East Rutherford, N.J. He watches more game tapes than television shows or movies. He has no major hobbies. And despite the long hours, Frank always seems to be in overdrive when it comes to



fired and Frank took over.

Thorn said that when he interviewed Frank six years ago, he saw evidence of his basketball I.Q. in the thorough scouting reports he had prepared for Vancouver. Colleagues say that Frank's basketball knowledge and preparation set him apart.

"If you talk to him today about what Sacramento is going to do with their new coach, Eric Musselman, he'll tell you exactly what they're doing, what plays they're going to run from out of bounds, what they're going to do at the end of the game, and Eric hasn't coached one thing with Sacramento," Thorn said. "But he already knows it because he studies every team and he studies coaches."

Frank frequently calls his players and sends them text messages on their cellphones. He has his assistants visit them in the off-season and he often passes along ideas from the motivational books he reads.

"I regret giving him both of my numbers, because he just won't text message one phone; he'll text message both phones," said Antoine Wright, a second-year swingman.

On a recent Sunday, just before training camp, Wright went to the Nets' practice facility to work out. He found Frank taping motivational messages to the players' lockers.

"I'm like, 'Coach, you don't get people to do these jobs?'" Wright said. "That just makes you believe in what he says. You know he wants to



has no major hobbies. And despite the long hours, Frank always seems to be in overdrive when it comes to basketball.

"I know it sounds corny, but when you love what you do, and it's a passion, it's not a job," he said in a recent interview.

Since becoming the head coach two and a half seasons ago, Frank has led the Nets to victory in 56.9 percent of their regular-season games. Although he is signed through next season, he is under pressure to lead the Nets to playoff success now. Last season, the Nets lost to the Miami Heat in the second round.

The Nets have some of the top perimeter players in the N.B.A. — Jason Kidd, Vince Carter and Richard Jefferson — and a supporting cast that has the confidence of the team's management.

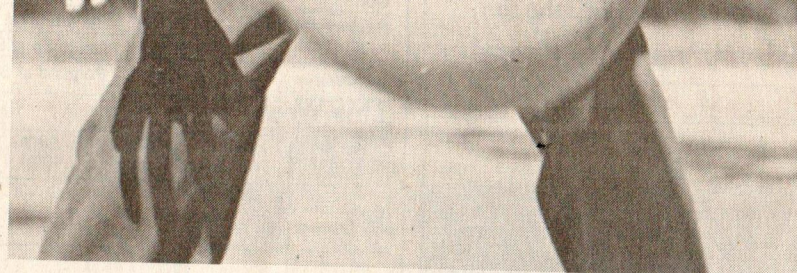
But Kidd is 33 and exiting his prime, and Carter can opt out of his contract after this season. Even with that talent, the Nets were inconsistent last season, with five losing streaks of three games or more. Their offense was often stagnant, and the team lacked depth.

Several reserves, most notably Jeff McInnis, said they were unhappy and confused with their roles. Although McInnis, a point guard, remains under contract, the Nets have asked him to stay away from the team.

Frank may not have earned universal respect from his players, but he appears to have it from his bosses.

"I think, in the areas that a coach, to me, has some control over, I think he's done an outstanding job," said Rod Thorn, the team's president. "I would expect that that will continue."

Frank has been preparing for this job almost as long as he could walk and talk. As the youngest of three boys, he was too small to keep up in driveway pickup games, so he stood courtside and shouted advice. When he watched Knicks games on televi-



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sion, he dissected the plays. His brothers, Bruce and Steven, and their friends sometimes asked him for his opinions on the games they watched.

"Physically, he wasn't up to the challenge," Bruce Frank, 44, said in a telephone interview. "But mentally, understanding the game was his way of being involved with us. We took him half-serious. He was a 7-year-old kid telling us that we're not setting the pick right."

Although basketball was his main love, Frank played baseball and soccer on Teaneck community teams and was on the high school tennis squad. He made money by delivering *The Record* in Bergen County.

During a couple of summers, he attended Camp Greylock, an all-boys sports camp in Becket, Mass. There, his brothers starred on the basketball court while he distinguished himself on another stage. With his shaggy red hair, he played the role of Andy in the camp's musical, a male version of the Broadway show "Annie."

Andy Miller, an agent for several N.B.A. players including Kevin Garnett, was Frank's best friend in Teaneck. Miller said they used to ride bikes and play sports together, but they also considered themselves entrepreneurs. They waxed cars one summer and parked them as valet drivers during another. In middle

school and high school, they organized a flag-football league that included charging a registration fee and buying jerseys.

"We were always looking to find a way to kind of make it in this world on our own," Miller said.

At a skinny 5 feet 7 inches, Frank did not play organized basketball past middle school. Instead, he sought a path to coaching by attending Indiana University. Bob Knight, the Hoosiers' basketball coach at the time, allowed Frank to be a team manager. Though he received a degree in education, Frank essentially majored in basketball.

"He paid attention to what we were doing and how we did things," Knight said in a telephone interview from Lubbock, Tex., where he now coaches Texas Tech. "When you asked him to do something or told him to do something, you knew it was going to get done."

On a recommendation from Knight, Frank landed a job as an assistant under Kevin O'Neill at Marquette in 1992. He later followed O'Neill to Tennessee. After a brief break from coaching, Frank became an advance scout for the Vancouver Grizzlies.

In 2000, the Nets hired him as an assistant to Coach Byron Scott. In January 2004, the season after the Nets made their second consecutive N.B.A. finals appearance, Scott was

messages to the players' lockers.

"I'm like, 'Coach, you don't get people to do these jobs?'" Wright said. "That just makes you believe in what he says. You know he wants to win. He goes the extra mile to be in your ear every day, to not take vacations and stuff, to spend more time here than being with his family."

Brett Yormark, the team's chief executive, said that Frank calmed him after the Nets lost Game 1 of their first-round playoff series to the Indiana Pacers last season. The Nets went on to win the series in six games.

"He motivates me when things are looking like they're not going too well," said Yormark, who was a senior at Indiana when Frank was a freshman and is a fellow member of the fraternity Lambda Chi Alpha. "He thinks of things half-full, not half-empty."

With that attitude, Frank has learned to cope with the burdens of coaching on his personal life.

During the season, his daughters — Dillon Grace, 5, Caitlin, 3 — are usually in bed when he gets home. He sees them only about two nights a week.

Even in the off-season, Frank visits his office almost every day, and he travels to clinics or other basketball-related events. When the family goes out to eat, Susan Frank said, she sometimes catches her husband jotting down a play on a napkin.

Still, she said, Frank finds time to put basketball aside. He recently took his daughters to the American Girl Place store in Manhattan so they could have their dolls' hair done. He also takes them for pancakes or to a park or to the Nets' swimming pool.

"When he's home, he's very good about giving attention to those who need it," Susan Frank said. "It really is quality versus quantity. In this kind of job, it's not about how much time, but what you're doing with your time."