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Personal chefs make sure basketball stars enjoy eating right

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October 14, 2004

The day the Miami Heat traded Lamar Odom to the L.A. Lakers, there were a lot of sad basketball fans. But none sadder than Wayne Bryan and Hugh Sinclair. That's not because they'd miss seeing Odom play at AmericanAirlines Arena. Instead, they were sad that they'd no longer be preparing barbecued ribs, turkey meatloaf or mashed boniatos for the popular player.

Bryan and Sinclair were Odom's personal chefs while he lived in Pinecrest and played for the Heat.

"When I heard the news he'd been traded, I tried to be calm, but I was dying inside," says Bryan, who is also an associate instructor of nutrition and sensory analysis at Johnson & Wales University in North Miami.

And Sinclair: "I was brokenhearted. It wasn't just because he was another client. But I got used to working with him and his family. His kids referred to me as Chef Hugh."

That's because the chefs not only cooked for the player but also his fiance, Liza Morales, and their children, A.J. and Destiny. "When they were making something spicy for Lamar, they always made something on the side for the kids like macaroni and cheese or spaghetti and meatballs," Morales says in a phone interview from Los Angeles, where the family now lives. The chefs also cooked for assorted friends and family as well as Odom's manager and trainer.

"We had good camaraderie," Sinclair says.

The cooking duo's tenure began when the Miami Heat called Bryan early in 2003. "They asked if I was interested in cooking for a player," explains this chef who had served as personal chef to Alonzo Mourning when he, too, played for the Heat. Bryan tells us that when he found out he'd be cooking for Odom, "I was so excited, I said, 'Great.'"

It was also an exciting time for the player.

"Lamar knew he could get recognized with the Heat, and he wanted the exposure he could get here," Bryan says. So he wanted to eat right and the team management thought a personal chef could help him do that.

Bryan showed up to meet the player who lived in what he describes as a beautiful home with a showy kitchen. Too bad it didn't have a pot or piece of kitchen equipment in it.

"I was starting from scratch," Bryan says.



For his chef tryout, Bryan had to prepare a meal. "Luckily, I'd brought a few pieces of equipment with me," he says.

When he asked the player if there was any type of food he particularly liked, Odom replied "Just make what you made for Alonzo [Mourning]."

That day, Bryan prepared teriyaki salmon with broccoli and rice.

"We'd had other caterers in California but none was like the good home cooking Bryan made for us. We liked his flavors," Morales says.

Bryan got the job. And the chef found Odom as easy to like at home as fans found him on the court.

"Just from meeting Lamar and cooking for him that first time, I wouldn't have known he was an NBA player, he was that down to earth," Bryan says.

Because Bryan teaches and couldn't always be available when Odom needed him, he brought in Sinclair to cook, too. Sinclair is a Johnson & Wales graduate who runs his own Chef Irie Spice personal chef service. "Irie" is Jamaican patois for "feel good," Sinclair explains, calling on the language of his homeland.

Together the two set up a team schedule so they'd be sure to be at Odom's house on game days and have food ready before and after practices.

On game days, Odom would usually take a meal to eat in the car on the way to the stadium. And that would usually be chicken or fish and a carbohydrate such as pasta. It was important for the 6-foot-10 inch, 225-pound player to get enough calories before he played, insisted his trainer.

"He had to have hearty food," Morales explains. Other days, it could be favorite dishes such as roast salmon with strawberry glaze (Odom really liked strawberries, Sinclair says), seafood fried rice, turkey lasagna ("That was always a big hit," Sinclair says), shepherd's pie or mango-glazed chicken.

Bryan says he could make four or five pizzas, turn around, and they'd be gone. "Lamar and his friends were big eaters."

Now that Odom and Morales have returned to L.A., it's not just South Florida fans who are sad.

"I really liked Fort Lauderdale," says Morales, who is doing the family's cooking these days. "And we really miss Bryan and Hugh. They were really cool."

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