

CSU feels the California budget crunch

By Wendy Hernandez
Assistant Editor

386.1 million dollars
10 thousand
90 thousand
4.41 dollars
7.46 billion dollars
1.7 billion dollars

These were the numbers that CSUB President, Horace Mitchell asked everyone to remember at the meeting, regarding the state budget, held in the Icardo Center Thursday, April 3rd.

President Mitchell defined these numbers as follows:

386.1 million dollars— The shortfall in the governor's proposed budget for 2008-2009 for the CSU.

"A shortfall of this magnitude is more than six times the total state funding for the CSUB campus. And would be equivalent to withdrawing state support for three campuses in the valley," said Mitchell.

10 thousand— The number of eligible students who will not be able to enroll in the CSU due to a reduction in funding.



President Mitchell addressing the student body about the budget crisis.

"The state provides just under half of the total funding that we need to support this campus. There is no funding in the governor's budget for enrollment increases. So all CSU campuses are expected to maintain our current enrollment for next year," said Mitchell.

90 thousand — Graduates entering the workforce.

4.41 dollars — The direct annual impact for the CSU, a return, for every single dollar invested, allocated, in the CSU.

"An investment in the CSU is not an expenditure to be reduced but

rather and investment in California's future," said Mitchell.

7.46 billion dollars — the amount of economic activity the CSU contributes in annual economic impact statewide.

"By not making the full investment represented by the CSU's purposed budget for the 2008-2009 the state will get a negative impact on the state's economy," stated Mitchell.

"The purpose of this event is for all of us to come together, faculty staff students administrators the CSU board of trustees and everyone in what we are calling the coalition for the CSU to develop advocacy strategies directed at the governor, the legislator, and I would add, the people of California to fully fund the CSU budget," said President Mitchell. "Rather than simply assuming that we are going to have particular budget cuts, our position has been, 'wait a minute, we are not going to assume that.' We are going to talk about how it is that we can work to prevent these cuts from being of this magnitude at the least"

Continued on page 3

CSUB helps in fight against MS

By Eman Shurbaji
Features Editor

The 8th annual Multiple Sclerosis Walk was hosted at Yokut's Park last Saturday, with over a thousand participants. The event brought together not only teams of walkers, but also local community leaders and families.

Kim Kotrla was the organizer of the event. She made sure all the logistics of the event were under way well before the event took place. Despite the MS walk occurring on Saturday, by Friday at 3 p.m., setup had already begun.

The teams that walked during the event comprised of a few or many individuals. The goal of each team was to raise as much money as possible for research that will eventually find a cure for MS. Each team member pledged to go out and retrieve money from family, friends and other resources. The team that raised the most money received

a grand prize. There were other prizes, such as sweatshirts, for other teams as well.

Kelly's Konquistadores was one of the largest teams present. Smaller teams, such as the CSUB team, were present as well.

Despite the giving away of prizes and free lunch, participants had a more profound reason for taking part in the event. Volunteers were comprised largely of family members or close friends of someone who had MS. Even immobile individuals were able to help by sitting at information booths or giving oranges and water to walkers as they passed by.

Sharon Higginbotham, a volunteer at the walk, has lived



The CSUB MS Walk Team.

with MS for a few years now. She contends that the support is amazing at the MS Walk.

"This is the best place to be," said Higginbotham.

Dennis Reed, a CSUB alumnus, graduated from California State College, Bakersfield in 1985. He went on to earn his teaching credential in 1986 and a master's in school administration in 1994 from CSUB.

Reed was diagnosed with MS

in 1994, yet he has much support from family and friends. Team Reed was among the teams present at the walk.

In addition to participating in the walk and eating pizza for lunch courtesy of Santa Barbara Pizza and Chicken, participants were able to form new friendships and rekindle old ones.

"When I first started, I had a couple of friends with MS, now I have hundreds," said Kotrla.

ASI elections

By Joshua Wuillamey
Assistant Editor

Are you interested in voting for the upcoming Associated Students, Inc. elections? Or perhaps you are hoping to run for a position yourself? The time to do so is now. Starting on April 7, you can pick up an application for a position in Associated Students, Inc. from the ASI office in the Student Union. Applications can be submitted until noon on April 18.

For the students who are only interested in voting, the campaigning will run from April 18 to May 8. The voting is done online, and can be done via your Runner email account. Every student will receive an email with an invitation and a link that will direct them to a site to cast their votes securely. The polls, however, close by 8 p.m. on Thursday, May 8. You can expect to see the results of your votes by Friday morning of May 9.

For those students interested in

running for a position in ASI, there are a few qualifications that you must first meet. These qualifications can be found under the ASI homepage on the campus website.

First, all students must have a 2.5 grade point average each term and not be on probation of any kind. All students running for office must have been enrolled on campus for one year, and have acquired 18 credits, as well as continuing to acquire 9 credits per quarter while remaining in office. More information about pre-election qualifications and post-election requirements can be found on the ASI website under government documents, labeled as Election Code

So if you are interested in developing your leadership skills and providing a voice for your fellow students, head over to the ASI office in the student union and pick up an application for office.

Grad Check waits plague CSUB seniors

By Ekate Udoh
Staff Writer

Spring quarter has commenced and with it so has the anticipation of graduating for many students who are in their last quarter. Before walking the stage there are a series of requirements that must be handled, one of which is the Grad Check. This is the final evaluation of a student's completed requirements for their major and minor, it also notifies the student of the last classes that need to be taken. There have been many complaints from students about their Grad Checks.

Darla Kendrick, who majors in Studio Arts and minor Communications, turned in her Grad Check ten weeks ago along with \$54, yet still has not received

a response, though she plans to graduate in the Spring. "I turned it in by the deadline in January, I should have had it back by finals," says Kendrick. She stated that when she went to admissions to find out where her Grad Check was "they basically said if you want it taken care of you have to do it yourself."

Not having her Grad Check has affected her quarter, "I completely dropped my schedule except for Senior Seminar and got all new classes, I also just received my financial aid to buy my art supplies and we are going into the third week." This also has repercussions on her job, which requires her to have diploma by this summer. Though Kendrick was informed on the third of this month that she would be graduat-

ing, which was a Thursday, the deadline for commencement was on the fourth, which she luckily did meet. Kendrick feels that she was very misinformed by her advisor and that there is a big problem of miscommunication between departments and admissions.

Kendyl Magnuson, the director of Admissions and Records, said that previously Grad Checks were previously taken no later than three weeks into the quarter they were going to graduate. Now new policy requires students to apply two quarters before their planned graduation date. Magnuson explained that there are a lot of pieces to the process, not all of which the Admissions office is in

control of. The first step is to turn in the application in a timely manner. Next the department must provide an outline of their requirements for their major and minor. After that the evaluation is done in the Admissions office, and returned to the student. The Grad Check can not be returned until all of these pieces come into place and this all should take six to eight weeks.

Magnuson states that there are various situations that may stand in the way of a student receiving their Grad Check expediently, such as a request for substitution or a waiver of some requirements, or a transfer student who needs a certain amount of requirements

taken from CSUB to graduate from CSUB.

Another component that hinges on the prompt return of Grad Checks is the transition from Banner to People Soft. According to Magnuson: "I would actually say that I believe that People Soft will ultimately be a very good thing for this institution but the process is like moving to a new bigger house, which is nice but not easy to do." His staff's role is so dependent on the database system and entering People Soft, in this time makes it difficult.

When a Grad Check is returned every requirement that needs to be filled is listed. Magnuson states, "The student needs to carefully read through each line."

It was shown that the Spring of 2007 who were actually able to graduate after their Grad Checks were 973, and this year so far there are 1250. Each individual application takes a significant amount of time.

Magnuson also gave several tips in order to avoid too much anxiety during this process: pick a major early, seek advising early in your career, and know the catalog because in the end the responsibility lies on the student. Work with the department, know the deadlines, and apply at least at least two to three quarters before your planned graduation to give yourself leeway for some reaction once notified.

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Group speaks on rape and sexual assault

By Ellen Piris
Assistant Features Editor

Thursday night, CSUB was visited by One in Four, a group of four men who tour the country in their 34 foot R.V. and speak to groups at high schools, universities and military bases about rape and sexual assault.

Rape is defined as sexual intercourse when a person does not, or cannot, consent. This includes the mental disabled or the intoxicated. Sexual assault is forced oral sex or touching.

The name One in Four comes from the statistic that one out of every four college women is a survivor of rape or attempted rape. The group is made of four men who graduated from universities all over the country last year, and try to educate people about how to help their friends reduce their risk and recover from sexual assault and rape. They wanted to make it clear that the most important thing to remember is that it is never the victim's fault, and that men should be taking a more active role in helping to prevent rape and sexual assault, which is why One in Four mainly speaks to groups of men only. This is their first year speaking to groups of women as well.

The focus of their presentation to the women's group was on avoiding high-risk men and dangerous situations.

According to the group, 4 out of 5 rapes are between acquaintances that, on average, have known

each other for a year. Men who rape women they know use words like "target" and "prey" to describe women, and usually plan out rapes ahead of time.

The One in Four presentation included a video entitled "Distinguishing Guys Likely to Rape from Guys Less Likely to Rape." It focused on an interview of a young man who admitted to rape. He explained how he and his friends would choose girls ahead of time,



Ellen Piris/The Runner

One in Four gave presentations about sexual assault.

usually young freshman girls, and make them feel honored by inviting them to a party at their fraternity's house.

He said it was better to pick young girls so that they probably would not be too familiar with their own alcohol tolerance. Then at the party the men would be sure to have a strong alcoholic punch for the girls to drink. The sweetness of the drink would hide the amount of alcohol so the girl would not realize she was drinking so much. He would then be affectionate to the girl throughout the party, make her feel special and then convince her to go into a previously designated room so they could "be alone and talk." At this point the girl is pretty intoxicated and he continues to

offer her more drinks. He then explains how he began trying to undress the girl against her will, even when she objected and began struggling. "Frank," as he was called, even says he did not mind her struggling. "It helped her clothes come off easier," he said.

He showed absolutely no empathy, only irritation, when the woman was experiencing probably one of the most terrifying moments of her life. Frank knew the girl was in no way consenting, but he did not seem affected by this fact. He did not show remorse or even use the word rape to describe his actions. Frank failed to realize that what he did was wrong. These men do not feel any fear of consequence because they do not think the woman will report them, and often they are correct. This is due to the fact that only 5% of rapes are reported to police, which makes rape the single most unreported crime in the United States.

A man who admits to rape will end up committing an average of six rapes in his lifetime. More information about rape and sexual abuse can be found at www.oneinfourusa.org or www.rainn.org.

Advice to Friends of Victims from One in Four

Urge your friend to get medical help. DNA evidence can be collected which will in convicting the attacker. Also, any wounds the woman may have received can be taken care of at this time.

Talk less, listen more. Your friend may or may not want to discuss the event in detail, so do not press with questions. It is most helpful to simply listen to whatever your friend wants to discuss.

Believe. Doubting your friend could make her feel at fault and she will be even less likely to go to authorities.

See a counselor. It might be stressful for you to be there for your friend through this traumatic experience, and it would be helpful if you and your friend both receive counseling, which is available on campus.

Violence in the community

By Jasmine Henderson
Guest Column

There I was, pinned against a car with what I thought was a gun to my neck. I knew he was yelling, but my eyes were tightly shut, my hands were in the air, all the sound was drowned out by the thoughts running through my head. "Be quiet, Jasmine. Just be quiet. He might pull the trigger."

All of a sudden I heard a crackling sound but felt nothing. I was tased with a stun gun. I had my life, but what did these actions say about the group of guys who decided to act out in violence for no reason? This young man had placed his hands on a woman and had the nerve to hit her, threaten her and ultimately, stun her.

The party Saturday night started out as a fun gathering, bringing people together with dancing, talking and chilling, everything a good party needs. As time went on, more and more people came flooding in, people who neither the host of the party, nor any of my friends knew. Sooner rather than later, the party was shut down by the supposed "cops" who came by, and the guests began to leave accordingly. The guys outside had realized that not everyone was leaving, that's when the trouble began.

I was sitting in the hallway right next to the entrance when a flood of 20 or so

black guys started to make their way back into the party.

"I thought the party was over," one of them had said sarcastically.

Someone answered them, "They don't want ya'll niggas here!" As things began to escalate, I stepped outside.

Chaos broke out inside the house. I saw my roommate run away toward two friends and their car. Something was not right. One of the guys tried to run back into the house.

"Wait. Don't worry about it in there. Just chill," I pleaded to him, but calming words only seemed to enrage him even more as he began to step towards me, calling me a bitch.

Next thing I knew, one of his friends had slammed me against the car, and when I could finally open my eyes after the attack, he had already run back into the pack huddled in front of the drive way.

In anger, I yelled, "This is why they don't want ya'll niggas here," and I walked back towards the house.

By the grace of God, we all left there with our lives, but two of my friends got jumped, four randomly punched and some stunned.

What conclusion can I come to? A better question might be: what does this have to say about our community, our city, our state, and our country? People speak about change, but unless our



Photo courtesy of Jasmine Henderson
Jasmine shows marks left from the stun gun.

youth is willing to change and unless the adults teach them how to achieve it, it can never come.

When is it right to put your hands on a woman -- and with a stun gun?

I came out with bumps and bruises, but my cut is really within my heart. This experience has shown me why there is the stereotype of violence in the black community. A community that, by her-

itage, I am half a part of and after this weekend, am ashamed of. How could this behavior merit real men? The black community wishes to not be placed in this definition of person, but these acts only seem to perpetuate the ignorance. To those who did this to me and my friends, know that I love you amidst your ugly actions, and love can transcend all.

RUNNER ON THE STREET

By Eman Shurbaji

This Week, The Runner asked, "Considering the proposed \$386 million budget cut, what do you feel should not be cut from CSUB?"



"I don't think field trips should be cut. I take field trips with my biology classes."

Jessica Brodes
Senior, Biology



"Probably teachers, so we don't have giant classes."

Kerry Cannion
Senior, Biology



"I think classes are most important. It's going to take longer to graduate."

Janie Rueles
Business Administration,
Freshman



"I don't think they should cut any of the lower division classes' I think education should come first."

Paloma Ochoa
Sophomore, Business Administration

Honors students to hold conference at CSUB

By Ashley Sizemore
Assistant Editor

CSU Bakersfield is holding the sixth annual CSU Honors Conference.

This is the first time being held at CSUB. CSU Honors Consortium Chair Michael Flachmann is excited to be having it in Bakersfield.

“Although we’ve had five CSU Honors Conferences, this will be the first at CSUB. I’ve been involved with all the honors programs on the different campuses because I’m chair of the CSU Honors Consortium,” said Flachmann, “which coordinates the activities of all the honors programs in the CSU System.”

The students are basically running the Honors conference. They are giving presentations, introducing speakers, guiding students to rooms, and providing entertainment for the night before.

“Though we’ll have many Honors Program

Directors from throughout the system in attendance, only the students will be speakers. It’s a wonderful opportunity for honors students from all the different campuses to get some experience speaking at a state-wide honors conference,” said Flachmann, “They’ll get to meet honors students from other campuses, listen to papers on a wide variety of interesting topics, and expand their academic resumes, which will help them secure good jobs after graduation and/or get into graduate school in the future.”

Students will be giving approximately 15-minute presentations on various subjects.

“The topics will range over a wide variety of interesting subjects, including Terror in Rwanda, Statistics, Testosterone Replacement Therapy in Women, Dating Web Services, Ribosomes, The German Blitzkrieg, Commuter Students, Integrating Technology into our Lives, Hmong Culture, Drug Use, How to be an Effective Teacher, Abraham Lincoln and Slavery, Media and

Celebrities, Study Abroad Programs, Elastase Enzymes, Suffering as a Way to Achieve Optimism, Conspiracy Theory, Self Defense for Women, and many others,” said Flachmann.

All CSUB students are welcome to attend the conference and learn from each of these topics.

The conference will be held in the Business Development Center. Programs will be available at the registration desk at 9 a.m.

Flachmann expects about 60 students and also their faculty sponsors.

“I’m so excited that all these bright and energetic honors students from throughout the CSU System will be visiting our beautiful campus,” said Flachmann, “I’ll also be very, very proud to showcase our own wonderful CSUB Honors students, who will be giving many of the papers at the conference.”

Battle of the Badges opens Celebrate CSUB

California State University, Bakersfield is partnering with the Bakersfield Police Activities League to host the 14th annual Battle of the Badges on Friday, April 25, at 7 p.m. in the Icardo Center. The Battle helps the campus kickoff its second annual Celebrate CSUB! university-wide open house to be held the following day.

This first-time collaboration between PAL and CSUB showcases law enforcement and correctional officers trading punches for charity. PAL wanted to move the event to a bigger venue and felt CSUB was a perfect fit.

"It's entertaining, but the bottom line is we need to do as much as we can for PAL," said Bob Barton, co-chair for Battle of Badges fundraiser. "We have a boxing program, after school activities, a full-time tutoring program, basketball league, soccer, girl social development activities, arts and crafts. We are totally funded by donations,

grants and fundraisers. We need community support for all we do."

Barton stresses the importance of PAL. "We want to meet these kids on the front end," he said. "My kids in our programs would be running the streets if it weren't for PAL."

Tickets for Battle of the Badges can be purchased at the PAL Center at 301 E. Fourth St., the police station at 1601 Truxtun Ave., Raymond's Trophies at 300 Chester Ave. and Mr. Tuxedo at 2409 Brundage Lane. Ringside reserved seating is \$40, general admission, \$20, students with ID, \$10. For details, call (661) 283-8880.

For additional information about Celebrate CSUB!, please log onto www.csub.edu/celebrate, the site is updated as events are added, or call (661) 654-2175.

Courtesy of Public Information

Latina Conference reaches out to women

Erica Juarez
Staff Writer

Latin women came to CSUB to tell young Latinas that college is the key to success.

Vanessa Lee Aguayo, an Environmental Engineer from Chevron Company, came to CSUB and told the story of her struggles with life and college in front of several hundred high school students.

There were high school students from South, Highland, and Liberty.,

Students also came from Bakersfield, North, Shafter, Arvin and many other high schools whom attended.

When Aguayo was 15 years old she had been in a mentally abusive relationship and at 16 ended up pregnant.

She did not have her parents support.

She had three sisters who became her closest friends and supporters.

Scared, and not knowing what to

do, she had to come up with a plan, which was to finish high school, go to college and get a job.

She struggled but managed to graduate from high school and attend Colorado University.

While she was in college she had to raise her baby, work, had low grades, new relationships, abuse, day care issues, and money problems.

She was eventually dropped from school.

After all the struggles she was given another chance.

She ended up working two jobs and managed to earn a Bachelor's in math and science and then a Master's degree.

There were many students at the meeting who most likely have the same problems Aguayo had and were able to relate to her.

The students were then separated into groups and were assigned to meet with 4-5 other guest speakers.

They were allowed to ask questions and find out how these

women overcame problems and went to school to make something of themselves.

The conference was an inspirational program for young Latinas, which will hopefully help to inspire them to go to college when they graduate from high school.

Such women as Denise Renteria-Arreguin, Maria Delgado, Eugenia Navarro-Ambriz and Victoria Champion all struggled with life issues and managed to go to CSUB and graduate with Bachelor's degrees. Some even got their Master's.

All these women had problems such as lack of money, support from parents, working and going to school at the same time.

It's hard but, these women did it and that makes them great role models for these young women.

Victoria Champion said, "I think my greatest accomplishment is being a good role model."

She is a graduate student from Highland High and CSUB. She

is now a counselor for the outreach program at CSUB.

Maria Delgado, however had support from her family, but money was an issue.

"It was difficult to seek higher education," said Delgado.

Her father was a migrant worker. Money for college was hard to get.

Catherine Martinez, a former counselor of Delgado helped her achieve her goals and get through with college.

She struggled and managed to earn a Bachelor's Degree in Communications and Chicano studies.

The message these ladies wanted to get through to the students is life has hard times, but if you really want something anything is possible.

Aguayo gave four steps to success and they are to take action, take one step at time, have a positive attitude, and keep persistence with patience.

Ray Bradbury to visit Antelope Valley campus

California State University, Bakersfield's Antelope Valley campus is pleased to be sponsoring author Ray Bradbury on Tuesday, April 15 at 7 p.m. in The John Eliopoulos Hellenic Center, 43404 30th Street West, in Lancaster. Bradbury will speak about his life and his books.

Bradbury is one of those rare individuals whose writing has changed the way people think. His more than 500 published works -- short stories, novels, plays, screenplays, television scripts, and verse -- exemplify the American imagination at its most creative.

His best-known and most beloved books, "The Martian Chronicles," "The Illustrated Man," "Fahrenheit 451" and

"Something Wicked This Way Comes" are considered masterworks. His timeless, constant appeal to audiences young and old has proven him to be one of the truly classic authors of the 20th century - and the 21st.

In recognition of his stature in the world of literature, Bradbury was awarded the National Book Foundation's 2000 Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters, and the National Medal of Arts in 2004.

The event is open and free to the public. Seating is limited and will be available on a first come, first served basis. For more information contact Charles MacQuarrie at (661) 654-5098.

Courtesy of Public Information

CSU System budgets (continued)

The event started with president Mitchell's speech. There were then messages and speeches from the executive VP of ASI Valerie Poyner, the Chair of Academic Professionals of California Chief Steward Patrick Choi, Statewide University Police Association Representative Darren Chaney, State Employees Trades Council United Steward Kelly Sawyer and California Faculty Association Chapter President Jacqueline Hughes.

President Mitchell made his speech in regards to investment and education.

"Education at all levels represents an investment in California's future," said Mitchell.

The currently enrolled students have the possibility that their graduation can be delayed because these cut back can lead to reduction in courses.

"Right now, in terms of priority, the state is spending almost as much for prisons as it is spending

for all three segments of public higher education, the community colleges, the CSU and the UC. It has resulted in asking this question: Is it a priority for the California to have first class prisons and second class higher education institutions?" stated Mitchell.

The answer is NO! Deegan's speech focused on the return on educational investment.

"We have gotten much more out of the system than the system puts into us. And we have to convince the people of our state, the legislator and the governor that this is an important thing to continue. We need to put money into our students," said Deegan.

Finnell's speech was the importance of the impact the budget cut would have.

CSUEU represents CSU staff members. The impact can and will affect services provided such as: health services, custodial services, assistance with day to day needs for students, computers and networks, labs, response

times of safety officers and many more as according to Finnell.

"CSUB generates about 12 million dollars in tax revenues every year," said Finnell. "Everyone in the area would suffer in some way if allocations to the CSU are reduced. The governor's proposal is to save tax dollars in the short run while loosing vital services to students and the community as well as cutting the potential for higher monetary returns in the long run."

Choi focused on the academic aspect through his speech.

"If the budget does get cut, not only the access may be denied but the personal services that we can provide for you could be jeopardized. And not only will the students not be able to come to Cal. State Bakersfield. But heaven forbid one of these services that we can provide may be deterred and that we may not be able to continue," said Choi.

Hughes main message was to urge all to fill in the alliance card that was handed out as everyone

walked into the Icardo Center. Her priority was for everyone to know 'CSU is the solution'. Aside from everyone signing one card, she urged everyone to take between 20 and 30 more cards and have them filled out. Though her message was powerful, there were students and others that were dissatisfied with the organization.

"We want to know how come after all the times we filled out a form no one from CFA has contacted us?" asked three students at CSUB. "We haven't even been updated on anything. This speech has been the only update we have heard in the last couple quarters. At least today they said how we could help, while normally they only say what is wrong."

Near the end of the budget summit questions were asked. Two particular questions were raised. Concern was focused on the construction on campus and President Mitchell's wage.

"If the focus is on getting us more teachers and keeping that

money in the system and the in CSU, how do we justify taking a pay increase that conceivable kept two people from going to work?" said Dan Olive, a concerned student. "I am a little frustrated that we are laying out all this money. And I understand that the money comes from all these different sources, but we are in a crisis."

Olive moved to Bakersfield particularly to come to CSUB and go back to school and hopes to graduate come this winter.

Responses to his questions were the following. The new math and science building was funded by the state with a bond issues taken

care of before. Student fees that have been increased are paying for the new recreation center. In regards to his, President Mitchell, pay increase he justified it by saying that everyone took a pay increase last year.

In an effort to have an impact on the budget there will be a march April 21st in Sacramento. Those marching will leave between 3 and 4 am that Monday morning. Possibility of traveling in CSUB's own bus is favorable. However, if too few students decide to attend the march, then CSU Long Beach has offered to stop by and pick up those marching on their way.



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Mateen Cleaves: perception vs. reality

By Phillip Barnett
Sports Editor

I'm sitting courtside before an NBADL game between the Bakersfield Jam and the Idaho Flash. The two teams are warming up before what seems to be the largest crowd I've ever seen at a Jam game. We're a few minutes away from the National Anthem, (which will be sung by some children's choir and will receive the biggest response for any singing of our country's anthem for any sporting event in Bakersfield. I thought the performance was sub-par and sounded like a recording from a cassette tape) and Mateen Cleaves is right in front of me nodding his head and singing the words to TI's "Bring 'em Out."

You might not know much about the Big Ten's all time assist leader, or you might not have heard anything remotely positive about the 2000 NCAA Final Four's Most Outstanding Player because Mateen Cleaves' career has not been what any of us expected. Cleaves was drafted 14th in the 2000 draft and became the most overpaid cheerleader in the world by the time he found himself in Sacramento on those teams that, unfortunately, hit their peak during the Kobe-Shaq era. Since he was traded from the Motor City, Cleaves hasn't found a home in the NBA finding himself on five different NBA rosters, two teams overseas and a trio of NBADL teams.

The legacy of Cleaves may forever be that kid in the Spartans jersey with the huge smile on his face doing that silly little dance after time expired on Florida's hope for a national championship. We'll always remember that break away where he was seemingly undercut by the Gators Teddy Dupay, sending him to the hardwood in agony. We'll always remember watching him hobbling toward the locker room with an ankle sprain that looked to be the end of a magical run by Tom Izzo's boys.

We'll always remember that return to the game in Willis Reed like fashion where he finished the game on one good leg, willing jump shots into the basket sparking a run that would ultimately put the Gators away. We'll always remember how great watching Cleaves was in college, but that's probably all we'll remember.

It's just seconds until tip-off (and they're playing that old NBA on NBC tune. I'm not sure how legal this is) and Cleaves, the D-League's March player of the month (for averaging 21.6 ppg, 10.1 apg, 5.7 rpg, and 2.3 spg in just 10 games), is standing in the backcourt with a band-aid on his irregularly large forehead and already giving directions to his younger teammates. In about three hours from now, Cleaves will sit down and talk to me after being outplayed by Idaho's Randy Livingston in a five-point loss. Cleaves will score seven points less and shoot 20 percent under his season average, but he will have 16 assists and finish three rebounds shy of a triple-double.

As basketball fans, we probably won't remember anything else Cleaves does on the court because the fact is, I'm here in Bakersfield watching him in games that are only televised locally and on channels you have to pay extra for as a part of an NBA package. I met Cleaves 20 minutes before their pregame shoot around, and he had the enthusiasm of that same kid at Michigan State staying an extra year chasing that ever so elusive national championship, not that of a 31-year-old who was passed on by six different NBA teams. After meeting him, I couldn't figure out why everyone I told about the interview (myself included) had so many negative things to say about him. He may not be as talented as we all expected him to be, but he's chasing a dream, and I'm just not one to shun people for chasing a dream (no matter how far off it seems).



photo courtesy of JAMD.com
Mateen Cleaves during his senior season at Michigan State.

lot into my game, so, honestly can't tell you what it is.

PB: You've been given so many chances already. What happens when you're given another chance? What is going to make things different?

Mateen: I know if I do get the opportunity I'm going to play well. I just really don't know what they're missing, but I have fun on the court though. If somebody gives me a chance, they're going to find a diamond in the rough.

Before this interview, I probably would have laughed at the idea of Cleaves being a diamond in the rough for any of the 30 NBA teams, but while he spoke, as crazy as this may sound, I believed every word. I thought, maybe this is the perception that he was talking about. He's been perceived as a guard not ready for the league, maybe a trouble maker for a few bad off-court decisions, but he's mature now. However, this perception isn't just coming from NBA scouts, coaches and general managers, it's coming from casual basketball fans too.

I told various people about interviewing Cleaves and I generally got the same response from everyone. Zach Harper, editor of the website talkhoops.net told me to ask him to put his check on the line in a one-on-one game. My father

asked me to ask him what it was like sitting on the bench while the Lakers destroyed the Kings year after year. I even had a few stark remarks about the former standout point guard.

After I got home from the interview, it took me a while to grasp the idea of Mateen Cleaves, with a plate of massive portions of roast beef, rice and beans, convincing me of his ability to play at the highest level; especially after watching him play well on an off night for him. I know it's the D-League, but his poise in the fourth quarter was unparalleled with anyone else in the gym that night. Sure, the Jam lost, but there was a five possession sequence where he was able to find his way to the rim or find the open man. He didn't force anything; he just let the game come to him.

"I just come out and play ball. I'm one of those guys that just loves what I do. I've been blessed to be able to do the things that I do. I have fun with it, every time I step on the floor whether its in the game or at practice, every time I get on that floor I have to work hard. The stats come with me trying to win. I'm not a guy that looks to go out and score 20 points and have 10 assists. I just play the game."

Nothing Cleaves told me in the interview was false, he didn't breathe a breath of arrogance and his body language never told me he was bitter about not being in the NBA right now. He has a better attitude than guys like Stephon Marbury or Steve Francis and he's just as talented, if not more talented, as guys like Smush Parker or Royal Ivey, but the reality is, he hasn't found a home in the NBA yet.

Cleaves may have the tool set to be a back-up point guard in the league, he may be more mature than every guard on the New York Knicks, but the reality is his time is running out at 31 years old and the NBA has the wrong perception of Cleaves.

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