

EXPOSURE



THE LOYAL LEGACY

Coming home: Paul George

Story by [Fresno State](#)

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For Paul George, walking through the doors of the Save Mart Center is a trip down memory lane.

The building is where the six-time NBA All-Star and 2016 Olympic gold medalist donned his No. 24 Fresno State jersey. It's where his parents watched him from the stands as he led the Bulldogs to many victories. And it's where he made life-long connections that changed his life forever.

"Just pulling up down that ramp, walking into the arena and taking that same route that I would take as if I was going to the locker room — all of this is just refreshing and taking me back down memory lane again," Paul says.

A player for the Los Angeles Clippers, Paul is one of 31 former Bulldogs to play in the NBA. On Nov. 10, 2019, he was celebrated during halftime at the Fresno State men's basketball regular season home opener.

Paul is the second former men's basketball student-athlete to be honored with a jersey retirement, joining former Bulldog coach and student-athlete Jerry Tarkanian.

"I wouldn't have dreamed this in a million years to be able to come into Save Mart Center and to be able to look up and see [No.] 24 hanging in the rafters," Paul says. "It's a big honor and I'm humbled by the opportunity of having my name and number up there."

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Athletics director Terry Tumey says that Paul's place in the Save Mart Center is well deserved:

“Paul George for us is a quintessential Bulldog and this place will be his forever.”

Coming Home: Paul George



TIP-OFF

Paul is a Palmdale native who learned humility and work ethic from his parents.

“Nothing was given, everything I had to work and earn and put the time in. So I appreciate the struggle, I appreciate the grind,” he says. “I know how fast things can be taken away.”

As a teenager, Paul accepted a scholarship to play basketball at Pepperdine University. He was to follow in his sister Teiosha's footsteps, who played for the Pepperdine Waves women's basketball team. But when the coach at Pepperdine resigned, Paul's availability reopened.

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“I’ve said this before and Paul’s aware of this. He comes from a great family and when I recruited Paul and we were involved with Paul, he obviously was a very good athlete and he had a skill set and you could see that there was a very high ceiling,” says former Fresno State men’s basketball coach Steve Cleveland. “But probably the most impressive thing to me was what we call the intangibles. He just had an amazing attitude. He was a good teammate. He was selfless. He was a leader. I think his leadership qualities are the things that stand out most to me.”

Before Paul accepted his place at Fresno State, he visited the campus and enjoyed that it was close to his family home in Palmdale, knowing his parents would want to attend his games.

“I fell in love with the campus, fell in love with the atmosphere,” Paul says. “And I honestly felt like this was home, so I went ahead and went with it and I’m happy with the decision.”



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COURT VISION

Paul spent two years as a Fresno State student-athlete before being drafted No. 10 overall in the 2010 NBA Draft by the Indiana Pacers.

“Fresno took me in, a young kid out of a small city in Palmdale,” Paul says. “I’m indebted. This is a place where I learned a lot ... This became my new family here.”

As a Fresno State freshman, Paul received national attention with the No. 1 play of the day on ESPN's Sportscenter after a memorable dunk during a game against Saint Mary's. He finished the season as one of the top 15 freshmen scorers in the country.

During his years at the University, he averaged 15.5 points, 6.7 rebounds and 2.4 assists in 63 games.

“Fresno State is a big chapter in my story, something that I cherish and I think people should know,” Paul says. “And when I look back at things I cherish, I embrace what made me who I am today and I value that. And it's about loyalty as well with me. People that have been in the trenches or been down with me since day one ... Without Fresno being a part of my story, nothing else would be a part of my story.”



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LOOKING FORWARD

Paul spent seven seasons in the NBA with the Pacers, two seasons with the Oklahoma City Thunder and became a member of the Clippers in the summer of 2019. He appeared in 604 career NBA games, averaging 19.8 points, 6.4 rebounds and 3.3 assists with the Thunder and Pacers.

Paul says he has a sense of camaraderie with fellow professional athletes who are Fresno State alumni. In 2017, he attended the jersey retirement of NFL player and Fresno State alumnus Derek Carr.

"I'm very supportive of those guys — Derek Carr, Aaron Judge, of what their careers are doing. And I think it's great that we have a trio of guys that are representing our sports respectively," Paul says. "Anytime that I can find time to cheer or root for them, go to a game ... We're a fraternity, this is Bulldog bred right here."

Terry says celebrating Paul on Nov. 10 was a part of honoring the great athletic tradition at Fresno State. On Nov. 9, the University honored Ruth Lawanson, an Olympian in volleyball who won a bronze medal in 1992.

"So as we look forward to our leaders and what we do in the classroom and we look for models, I don't think we could find a better person to model what our student-athletes are about and what they do than Paul," Terry says.

Before the halftime ceremony on Nov. 10, current Bulldog student-athletes donned Paul George shoes in honor of his attendance. After the game, the Clippers surprised Paul at the Save Mart Center in celebration of his jersey retirement.

"There were a lot of good memories here. From big games to hanging out with friends here, to experience with teammates off the court — I had a lot of great, fond memories," Paul says about Fresno State. "In a way, this is coming back home again."



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Footnote: *Photos by Cary Edmondson, Story by Esra Hashem, Video by Domenick Satterberg — University Brand Strategy and Marketing; Fresno State Athletics Contributed to This Story*
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