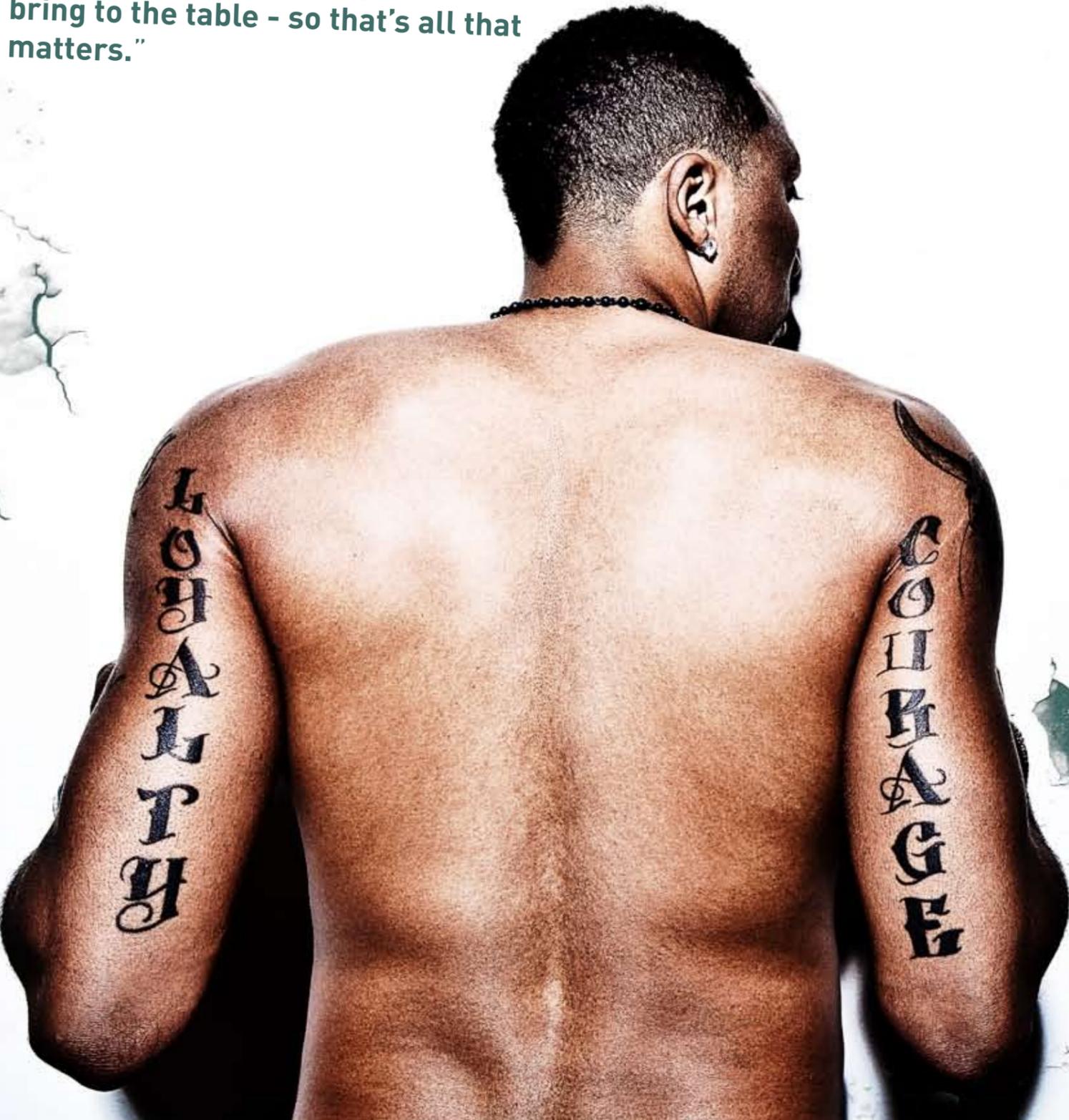


HOW THE WEST WAS WON

Growing up in Chicago, Shawn Marion stood in awe of some of basketball's greatest, and now – years later – he promises to leave his own legacy behind for the next generation of NBA superstars.

by Gina Ponce Photography by Miguel Starcevic
Grooming by Melissa Walsh @ Beauty and Photo using Dermalogica

“People who know the game, and they understand the game, know what I’m capable of doing and what I bring to the table - so that’s all that matters.”



Twelve years is a long time to wait for anything. But for Dallas Mavericks forward Shawn Marion, who has spent every minute of his NBA career playing towards one objective since being drafted in 1999, the wait is finally over. The last dozen years have come down to this past season, which ended with a championship ring on his finger and the kudos of shutting down some of the biggest scorers on the court with his defensive skills.

“At the end of the day it’s a great individual challenge and team challenge. I didn’t do it by myself, but at the end of the day it’s a big accomplishment,” Marion speaks of making things difficult for Lakers’ Kobe Bryant, Thunder’s Kevin Durant and Heat’s LeBron James in the postseason. “[But] the biggest accomplishment is winning a championship – and that’s the ultimate goal. You have aspirations at the beginning of every season to go out there and win a championship. If you don’t win a championship, you didn’t meet your goal.”

Joining the Mavericks team just two years ago, reaching championship status hasn’t been an easy battle for the 33-year-old. Although the issues of trades and free agency are common throughout each season, it still takes a strong player to find his niche after every team change, and the small forward has been able to do that with four different franchises. “Adjustments for me [depended on] the different stages of my career,” Marion explains. “The main thing is to stay focused and stay positive and help teams the way I needed to help and contribute the way I needed to contribute... as the years progress you sustain your repertoire, and I got to my [full] advantage and I was able to make adjustments for my teams.”

Drafted in the first round of the 1999 NBA Draft, Marion saw a rookie season that was a long time coming. He divulges that it was in high school he first realized his own potential to make it to the big time but continued to pursue a higher education, first at Vincennes junior college in Indiana then moving on to University of Nevada, Las Vegas – where he adamantly maintains there was no chance of him losing focus and getting swept up in the glitz and glamour of the Sin City lifestyle. “Every kid when you watch basketball players, you kinda imagine yourself playing in the pros. So everybody’s imagination don’t become reality unless they have the opportunity and have the skills, and I was fortunate enough to do that,” he says.

“I could have come out of junior college and went straight to the NBA, but I decided to go to UNLV another year and

compete at a higher level and see what’s what,” he continues. It was from there he would go on to transform into a staple player on the Phoenix Suns and earn the nickname he still carries with him today, “The Matrix.” “It was great, you know, that’s where I started my career. I came in as a young man and I left as a true man.”

After spending eight and a half years with the Suns, Marion was caught up in the ‘07-’08 season trade that sent him to the Miami Heat and Shaquille O’Neal to Phoenix. One short year later, he was off again to the Toronto Raptors where he finished the ‘08-’09 season before becoming a free agent and eventually signing with the Dallas Mavericks. It was a decade after beginning his career that he would become No. 0 and join forces with Dirk Nowitzki, Jason Kidd (a former Suns teammate), Jason Terry and the rest of the Dallas team to find the home that would house his first championship title.

“To reunite with J Kidd, to play with Dirk and Jason Terry... That was the whole reason I went [to Dallas],” Marion states. “It wasn’t about individual stuff; I already had individual accolades in the NBA. It’s about winning a championship title. My window to play this game is closing, slowly but surely, so I just wanted to make sure I got an opportunity to give myself a good chance to win a title. [Dallas] is my home. I’ve found a home in all the places. It was great times in Miami, but I knew it wouldn’t last long... it was that time for both parties.”

An ability to get the job done in a multitude of ways garnered The Matrix his moniker, and although you may not hear his name mentioned often enough, he’s proven a capability to live up to it. But suggest that he’s unjustly flown under the radar until recently and he’ll let you know. “I’m a four-time All-Star, All-NBA, I’ve been an Olympian. Shit, what else do you need? You know, I’ve done stuff. I’ve truly been blessed... People who know the game, and they understand the game, know what I’m capable of doing and what I bring to the table - so that’s all that matters.” With all the praise surrounding Marion’s defensive talents, especially in this most recent playoff and championship series, there has been a lot of speculation there would have been no Mavs title without the NBA vet, reminding naysayers of the effective player Marion has always had the skills to be.

Although he wouldn’t give up any secrets on - if ever given the opportunity - how he would personally defend teammate Nowitzki, who has proven to be a problem for most



“My window to play this game is closing, slowly but surely, so I just wanted to make sure **I got an opportunity** to give myself a good chance to win a title.”

defenders in the league, Marion did give insight into the most challenging type of player to defend, admitting that it's "all scorers in the league. They shoot a lot, so it's hard to guard any of them cause they're making shots, but at the same time you just got to make it harder for them... You just got to position yourself the best way you can."

Despite entering the playoffs with an impressive regular season record, coming in third in the Western Conference with 57 wins, and then incurring a shocking second-round sweep of back-to-back champs, the Los Angeles Lakers, the Mavericks were still arguably the underdog going into the finals series against the much-debated about Heat team and their "Big Three" players.

"I think we were underestimated all year," Marion asserts. "Everybody was saying, are we gonna do this, are we gonna do that at showtime? We don't get into [all of that]. Most everybody was talking about whether or not the team could do this or that. They just making predictions and most of them haven't even played ball period anyway. So they don't even know what the hell they talking about."

"We were just so focused and tuned in," he continues. "We just went out there and took one game at a time. We did that with everybody; we took one game at a time and we played resilient and just did what we needed to do to win, and that's why we were able to [develop] this season. We never quit."

It seems the title win would be made sweeter for a team not expected to win - especially for Marion, who took home the ring over two former teammates, Dwyane Wade and Chris Bosh (from his Miami and Toronto days). But he insists it was just all in the name of good competition. "I got much respect for those guys," he says. "And it wasn't personal or nothin'.... It was just three competitors playing each other, and we went for it and won a great team championship. I mean, everybody contributed from top to bottom. And that's why this is so special for us."

After winning their first trophy in franchise history, looking to take it all again next season will only come naturally for the Mavs, who are now facing possible roster changes. It's difficult enough to come back a year later and contend at the same level without what most are considering a real challenge for Dallas - that four of their main players are well into their thirties. But Marion has ideas of his own regarding strategies for a championship repeat.

"Well, first of all, we have to get through this lockout," he laughs. "But second, we just got to try and keep everybody together. And that's gonna be kinda hard 'cause we have a lot of free agents, but that's about it, really. If we can get most players back we can try to make a real run at this." With a lockout announced earlier this summer that may continue well into the 2011-2012 season, many players have to find ways to occupy their

sudden free time. In Marion's case, the game is just one of several things loaded onto his plate already. Philanthropy plays a big part in his life off the court, and he's well known for supporting and being an advocate for single mothers, since one raised him. The Illinois native began The Shawn Marion Foundation in an effort to raise awareness and give opportunities to single parent families by reaching out to people personally, working out grants and scholarships and putting together annual Christmas giveaways.

"I never really got a chance to see where my money was going until I actually became hands-on with [the foundation]," he explains. "So from there it just kind of developed more and more and I could use my money to actually see the work being done. I started the foundation and it's geared towards helping single families because I saw my own mother raise me and my sisters. So I was like, you know what, man? That's one of the best things you can do - is to help single mothers, [showing] them anything is possible...sending them back to school if they don't have an education so they can go out there and provide [for their family] for a long period of time. And that's what it's about. It's about giving back. It's hard; a foundation is hard work and it's hard to make money, but at the same time, I fund a lot of the stuff myself."

So it should come as no surprise that the family man has been in negotiations to star in his own reality show centering around the women in his life. Before long, L.A. Lakers' Lamar Odom may not be the only one to have ventured off the court and into a reality series to show the world on national television how he handles the ladies that surround him. Raised in a household that consisted of a single mother and three sisters (one being Shawnette, the other half of his twin set), Marion admits, "I'm not perfect, but I know females...being around my sisters and just hearing them talk about certain things, and of course, from my own personal experiences as well." If the show is eventually filmed and aired, time will certainly tell just what the NBA star thinks he knows about women.

As for life after the NBA, which may be a looming reality in the near future, Marion upholds a positive outlook and matter-of-fact ideas about what lies ahead.

"I got a lot of opportunities," he reasons. "The NBA is a great, great doorway to a lot of different avenues. I think the sky is the limit. If it's something I put my mind to, I can do it. It just depends on what I wanna do. I'm looking at things right now because before you know it, it's gonna be over with. I've been in the league 12 years now and it goes by pretty fast."

But not so fast that he'll ever have to look back and wonder what it would have been like to nab that championship title.