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Interviews: Curtis Granderson talks about his charity basketball game, his offseason and makes fun of Nate Robertson's hoops skills

Posted by [Patrick Hayes](#) | [It's Just Sports](#) December 29, 2008 14:45PM

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Curtis Granderson is becoming the face of the Detroit Tigers not only for his play on the field, but for his work in the community as well.

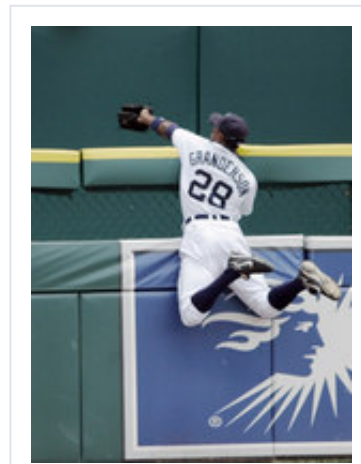
As a player, he can do everything ... hit for average and power, steal bases, play great defense. Off the field, he seems like a thoughtful and motivated person, as his two bachelor's degrees from the University of Illinois-Chicago will attest.

Granderson started the [Grand Kids Foundation](#) as a way to promote both educational opportunities and baseball in inner-cities. The foundation is having its second annual [Celebrity Shoot-Out](#) basketball game Jan. 17 at [Lake Orion High School](#), featuring UFC's Rashad Evans, Braylon Edwards of the Cleveland Browns, former Lions Lomas Brown, Herman Moore, Billy Sims and Desmond Howard, 2008 Miss America Kristen Haglund and many others.

The following is our interview with Curtis, who discusses the event, his goals for the foundation and his offseason so far.

Much of what the Grand Kids Foundation does centers around education. I am sure the fact that both of your parents taught plays a role, but anything else in particular in your life that inspired you to help that cause?

I think that's pretty much it. I am very passionate about education. Only a handful of MLB players have a college degree. I believe at one time I was one of only 30. Nationwide our educational systems are falling behind.



AP Photo

Curtis Granderson's [Celebrity Shoot-Out](#) charity basketball game Jan. 17 at Lake Orion High School.

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My goal is to see every child have the same educational opportunities, both as a youth and as they move into college. I also want to promote creativity. Not every kid can be good in math or science. But maybe they'd make a great chef, or a great poet or an artist. I want children to know that there are so many avenues for them to succeed.

Living in Flint, we have seen youth baseball participation go way down. How can the game thrive again in urban areas? Do you have any success stories from the work you have done promoting the game in those areas so far?

Not yet, but we are getting there. I think where the NBA has thrived so much in urban areas is that anyone can play basketball by themselves. All you need is a ball and a basket.

With baseball, you need to get a field large enough to hit balls through, get a hitter, a pitcher and probably a fielder - and that is just to play homerun derby. We need to show again to all youth that this is a fun game to play. I think it can flourish in urban areas, but we need to give those children role models as well. The NBA and NFL have sent athletes from all of their teams into these areas and promoted it. That's what we need to do in baseball as well.

How did the charity basketball game itself come about? You have quite an array of celebs this year, how do you round up participants?

My off-season is different from anyone else's. Last year, I wanted to do a big event, but didn't want to seem like I was copying everyone else. A lot of athletes have done bowling events. I love basketball, so I thought that may be a good fit.

As for rounding up participants - it has been easy. They all have a passion for wanting to help out the educational system in Michigan's inner cities. They believe in the cause. I didn't want to just bring in names to bring in names. I wanted to bring in people who believe in what my foundation is trying to do.

Do you have any specific goals as far as what you want to raise for the foundation with your charity game?

Right now every dollar counts. Of course we have goals, but those can be greedy. With the economy in the position it is in throughout Michigan right now, we just have to cross our fingers. It's tough to ask people during this time to come out and pay \$20 per person to watch a bunch of celebrities play basketball.

I do want them to know, though, that my foundation has zero operating costs. We don't pay employees or pay for celebrities to come in for this event. We have also had some groups jump in with in-kind sponsorships such as the Townsend Hotel, to help with those costs as well. Every penny on every dollar goes to this cause.

I know you are a coach in this year's game, but as a basketball fan, do you have any urge to get out on the court and play?

I always want to play, but contractually I cannot. Last year Nate Robertson and I did a three-point shootout at halftime. Maybe I'll find someone else to beat up on again this year.

You did work for Turner as a broadcaster during the playoffs, you served as a MLB ambassador to China in October, now you have the charity game coming up ... did you actually get any time to relax so far this offseason?

I am getting some. I brought my parents with me to China, and have also taken a couple of trips with some friends. So while I am not necessarily home, I am still relaxing and finding time for myself. That is important, especially with how long our seasons get.

How soon do you start getting ready for baseball season?

I am already doing some working out and training. I am about to get on a field and start working on my cuts, taking fly balls and batting practice as well. To treat this profession and the fans of the Tigers correctly, I have to stay focused all year long.

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