

Streetball Arrives With Flash

Alternative basketball tour places priority on wowing audience.

If you're a basketball fan in Los Angeles, you've probably heard the nicknames "Black Mamba" and "CP3" in reference to Lakers star **Kobe Bryant** and Clippers point guard **Chris Paul**, respectively.

But what about **Larry "The Bone Collector" Williams** or **Grayson "The Professor" Boucher**?

Those players are part of a growing phenomenon known as streetball, a flashier version of basketball intended to replicate the style of play seen on urban playgrounds such as Harlem's famed Rucker Park.

"Athleticism is showcased a little bit more," said **Demetrius Spencer**, a 37-year-old former executive at **Universal Music Group**, who created Ball Up, billed as the world's largest professional streetball tour to capitalize on the craze.

While Ball Up rules are similar to those of pro hoops, zone defense is not allowed in the offense-minded five-



On Ball: Ball Up's Demetrius Spencer at his office in Studio City.

on-five games, and players are encouraged to drive to the hoop as often as they can and wow spectators with high-flying plays, said Spencer, Ball Up's chief executive.

The first official Ball Up game took place at **Cal State Northridge** in 2010, and it has grown into an annual summer tour that plays small arenas in 10 U.S. cities, including Los Angeles, New York, Chicago and Las Vegas. The tour has also played about 50 games overseas.

Before the first ball was even tipped, Spencer secured a 10-episode broadcasting deal with Fox Sports. He executive-produces the show through his production company in Studio City, **One Media Worldwide**.

"They really took a gamble with us and it has paid off," Spencer said.

The show follows the try-outs held in each city to select a 10-person team, coached by a **National Basketball Association** player, that will

face off against a traveling Ball Up all-star team.

The Ball Up series also airs in 40 international territories, and Spencer said he's in the process of licensing the format to companies overseas to develop local shows. He has secured 27 licensing deals for a product and apparel line set to launch later this year, a revenue stream Spencer said could soon rival the broadcasting money.

"My intent for it is to surpass it," he said.

— Omar Shamout

Chinese City Opens Doors To L.A.

Coastal city Zhuhai sets up local office to raise business profile.

You know Beijing and Shanghai. You might have even heard of Shenzhen, the land of iPhones. Now, the city of Zhuhai in Southern China is ready to introduce itself to L.A. executives and investors.

The city last month opened an office in downtown Los Angeles after the apparent success of its first overseas economic development office, which opened last year in Germany.

While Chinese industry is often associated with pollution and kickbacks, **Devorah Worch**, the North America chief representative for **Zhuhai Commercial Service** — and currently the only employee in the downtown office — says Zhuhai is trying to stand out by defying those stereotypes.

"Zhuhai is a really clean city," she said. "It's a tourist destination in and of itself."

Worch says her role is to raise awareness of Zhuhai, one of China's original special economic zones, and build relationships with local trade organizations and businesses. She noted that a bridge



Shoring Up: Zhuhai.

set to open next year will provide a highway link from Zhuhai to Hong Kong via Macau, further promoting development.

While Worch said Zhuhai has become somewhat of a tourism hub, with Hong Kong Disneyland nearby, there's a lot more to Zhuhai than vacationers.

"There's a bonded warehouse. There's shipbuilding. General aviation. A high-tech industry," she said.

— Matt Pressberg

Hearing Execs Speak Volumes on Trip

Steven Sawalich, executive director of **Starkey Hearing Foundation** in Playa Vista, has traveled to 75 countries during his time at the non-profit, which delivers hearing aids to people in need.

It was formed by his stepfather, **William F. Austin**, founder of **Starkey Hearing Technologies** in Eden Prairie, Minn.

A recent trip to Ethiopia introduced Sawalich, 38, and his stepdad to a 20-year-old man named **Andreas** that changed their lives forever.

In addition to hearing problems, Andreas also had mossy

foot, a bacterial infection that's common in Ethiopia, which results in severe swelling of the feet.

What makes it more unfortunate, Sawalich said, is the social stigma surrounding the disease, which is treatable with soap and water. "They believe it's

God punishing them for being bad people, and only when they become a good person will their foot heal," he said.

Andreas had been shunned by his family and was living on his own, struggling to get by. To top it off, he had a large cancerous tumor on his thigh

that needed immediate treatment.

So Austin flew Andreas to a hospital in Israel that removed the tumor and secured a U.S. medical visa for him.

Andreas has been living with Sawalich's brother in Minnesota as he continues to heal.

"The past year has been about getting his health back," Sawalich said.

Board Room at Beach

Surfing and sunshine: two elements of the Southern California dream, and **Jonathan Port** is living them both.

PAGE 3

CHARLES CRUMPLEY

Port, 50, spends his workdays harnessing the sun as founder and chief executive of **PermaCity Solar**, a rooftop solar-power developer, located just blocks from the ocean in Santa Monica.

When he's not working, Port pursues his other passion: surfing.

"I grew up loving surfing as a kid," he said.

His boyhood idol was South African surfing legend **Shaun Tomson**, whom he met for the first time recently at a surfing fundraiser for **UC San Diego**.

The high point of Port's



Port

surfing life came four years ago when he surfed a wave off the Peruvian coast that others measured at 1.5 miles in length.

"It took me eight or nine minutes to ride that wave and that was the ride of a lifetime," he said recently.

Since his solar business has taken off, Port said that he has had less time to

devote to surfing. But he's still managing two trips this year. After a solar-power conference in Panama City, he plans a surfing side trip to Panama's coast. And then it's off to Hawaii's famous North Shore, a surfing mecca.

While he has competed in surfing fundraisers — his team took second in that recent fundraiser in San Diego — Port said these trips will be just for fun.

Staff reporters **Omar Shamout** and **Howard Fine** contributed to this column. Page 3 is compiled by Editor **Charles Crumpley**. He can be reached at ccrumpley@labusinessjournal.com.

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