


By Lee Butler
Photos by Suzi Issa



Houston Rockets Athletic Trainer Keith Jones with his wife Madge and 3 children - Morgan, Alex and Isaiah at home in Sugar Land

Keith Jones

Houston Rockets Sr. Vice President/Head Athletic Trainer Calls Sugar Land Home

For many area sports fans, seeing their favorite sports team in person is a lifetime dream. For Sugar Land resident, Keith Jones, it's a dream come true.

Living His Dream

From his courtside seat in the Toyota Center arena, Sugar Land resident, Keith Jones, helps keep our beloved Houston Rockets in tip-top shape and ready to dominate the court. For the past nineteen years, Jones has enjoyed a successful career as an athletic trainer in the National Basketball Association (NBA). He has worked with the Orlando Magic and the Los Angeles Clippers, in addition to the Houston Rockets. Jones has been the Head Athletic Trainer of the Houston Rockets for twelve years and has served as Vice President of Basketball Operations for five years. This year, he was elevated to Senior Vice President of Basketball Operations/Head Athletic Trainer. His position has given him the opportunity to work with and observe some of the NBA's most talented and popular players in the history of the sport.

A Real Family Man

Although Jones loves working for the Houston Rockets, his heart belongs to his wife and family. Keith met his wife, Madge,

while he was an athletic trainer at the University of Minnesota and she was a student. "When he was in college at the University of Arkansas, he worked in the athletic department. His coach, Lou Holtz, started working at the University of Minnesota and hired Keith," Madge said. They met, fell in love, and a few years later they were married. They have now been married for seventeen years and are the parents of three children, two daughters, 15-year-old Morgan, 12-year-old Alex, and a 10-year-old son, Isaiah.

Although privy to the lives of many sports celebrities, Jones manages to keep it all in perspective. "The things I like best about Keith are his honesty, integrity, and sincerity," Madge said. She believes that he is one of the most compassionate people she has ever met. "Keith is a quiet person by nature. I am the boisterous one," she adds. "The girls take after my husband, but Isaiah is active enough for all of them," she laughs.

Seeing His Future

Jones is a native of San Antonio, the son of an Air Force military man. He was raised in that area, leaving to attend the University of Arkansas. His first taste of being an athletic trainer was in high school as a sophomore. "I have never wanted to be anything but



Keith Courtside with Bonzi Wells and Yao Ming.

Seasons to Remember

When Keith first started with the Rockets, their coach was Rudy Tomjonovich. "He is still one of my best friends," Jones said. He also has a lasting friendship with former coach Jeff Van Gundy. Having worked with many headline basketball players through the years, Jones said he treasures his time with most of them. Some are in a class by themselves, he commented. Among those are Clyde Drexler, Charles Barkley, Hakeem Olajuwon, and later-day stars such as Tracy McGrady and Yao Ming. But, he thinks the best of the players with whom he has been associated, is Hakeem Olajuwon. "He really stands out in my mind," Jones said.

an athletic trainer since I first started," he said. Jones adds that he was too small, too slow, and couldn't jump, but he liked athletics. "Being an athletic trainer was the next best thing." An athletic trainer's job is multi-faceted. In addition to being a confidante to the young players, he must be familiar with all types of injuries that can occur on the athletic field, according to Jones. "The most common on the basketball court," he says, "are sprains, especially of the ankles. We also work with a variety of bumps and bruises." A physician is always nearby, if needed, he added, but the attention of the athletic trainer is always the most immediate.

The Rocket official said one thing for which he must always be on the alert is the overuse of various muscles. "The season is long and the games are frequent. In addition, we are always in training. It is easy to work the body too hard," Jones explained. He believes that all athletes, regardless of if they are amateur or professional, must be aware of the danger of over-training, thereby overworking the different muscle groups.



Keith has worked with some of the NBA's best players throughout his career

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"I think that in the future, we will be mentioning the names of current players Tracy McGrady and Yao Ming in the same breath as we do Barkley, Drexler, and Olajuwon," Jones added.

Olympics Bound

The fun-loving trainer points to many thrills over the years. Working as head athletic trainer of the USA 2000 Olympic Basketball team with head coach Rudy Tomjonovich is one of the highlights. A repeat opportunity is in the future, as Keith Jones has been selected as head athletic trainer of the 2008 USA Olympic Basketball team. The games will be played in Beijing, China. "The games start in July of next year," he said, "and I intend to take my entire family with me to Beijing. I think it will be educational, interesting and fun for them."



Keith Jones plans on taking his family with him to Beijing where he will act as Head Athletic Trainer for the 2008 USA Olympic Basketball Team

Home Sweet Home

To Jones, the only negative of his job is the time he must spend away from his family during basketball season. The team plays 82 games, of which 41 of them are away from Houston. "That means I am gone a lot," Jones said. The many hours spent in practice and in games can also wear on members of the team. For that reason, Jones, a natural kidder, tends to keep things loose around the team. He and the players are always teasing and playing practical jokes on each other.

Among the things he misses most when he is away from home is his wife's cooking. "She is a great cook," he bragged, "especially with several of her chicken dishes. When it comes to eating, there

is no place like home." For relaxation when he is home, Jones likes to pile the family in the car and drive around the Houston area. He and his family like to try various local restaurants. "In the non-basketball playing seasons, we usually go on vacations throughout the country, and in some cases, internationally. "These vacations really bring us close," he said. "This time together is really important to me."

Jones says he likes living in the Sugar Land area. "Being at home in our quiet area is relaxing," Keith said. "It is my time to take it easy and feel the love of my family." **SLM**

A young girl with dark hair is sitting in a classroom, raising her right hand. She is wearing a dark blue long-sleeved shirt. The background is slightly blurred, showing other students and classroom windows.

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Keith Jones and his wife Madge have been married 17 years.

LEE BUTLER was a news reporter in print and on radio and television for over twenty-five years, mainly in Texas. He is the father of five sons and a veteran of the United States Marine Corps.

It is easy to see Keith loves his job as Houston Rockets Athletic Trainer



Keith's job is to keep the Rockets players in tip top shape for the games and he is the first to respond to and evaluate a game injury



Keith works closely with the Houston Rockets coaching staff



Keith and Dikembe Mutombo courtside



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