

# Q&A Interview: Curly Neal

By CRAIG T. GREENLEE  
Chronicle Sports Editor

For 22 years, Curly Neal bedazzled, thrilled and entertained millions of people around the world with his dribbling antics as a member of the famed Harlem Globetrotters.

Even though Neal ended his career after the '85-'86 season, basketball is still a major part of his life. This season is Neal's fourth as the Special Projects Director for the NBA's Orlando Magic. But aside from his pro basketball duties, Neal still finds time to give something back to the community that helped him earn a good living as an active player.

On Tuesday, Neal, who grew up in Greensboro, visited Winston to help the Special Children's Home with its efforts to generate funds to construct a new facility for the Special Children's School. Neal's role focuses primarily on the promotions end of the campaign.

In the coming weeks, you'll see and hear Curly on public service announcements and on billboards around town.

The Globetrotters will be making a donation to the school when they play in Winston on Feb. 22. The team has pledged to contribute \$2 for each ticket purchased for that game.

The Special Children's School provides developmental programming and day care for high risk infants from birth to three years, and children three to 12 years old who have developmental disabilities.

Children are admitted to the school regardless of race, creed, religion or financial status.

Neal's visit to the Special Children's Home generated the typical reaction. Kids' faces lit up as they came in contact to see live and in living color, the game's most renowned dribbler. In between his visits and promotions work, the 49-year old NBA executive sat down with Chronicle Sports to talk about his life after jettisoning around the planet for more than two decades.

Because I played for so long, all over the world, most people know who I am.

**Chronicle Sports:** You're part of a growing number of blacks who are getting involved in other areas of athletics besides being a participant. Are there any specific things you'd like to see as far as blacks in non-playing roles?

Neal: I'd like to see a black

coach in Orlando. But I'd also like to see more blacks in coaching throughout the NBA.

**Chronicle Sports:** Would Curly Neal consider being a coach?

Neal: I wouldn't want to coach at the NBA level. For me, it would create more pressure than I would want to deal with. Any coaching I would do would be at the youth level. I get more of a

kick out of helping youngsters develop their skills as they learn to play the game.

**Chronicle Sports:** Lending your assistance to the Special Children's Home is a lot like some of the good will things you did while playing with the Globetrotters. What are your thoughts on that?

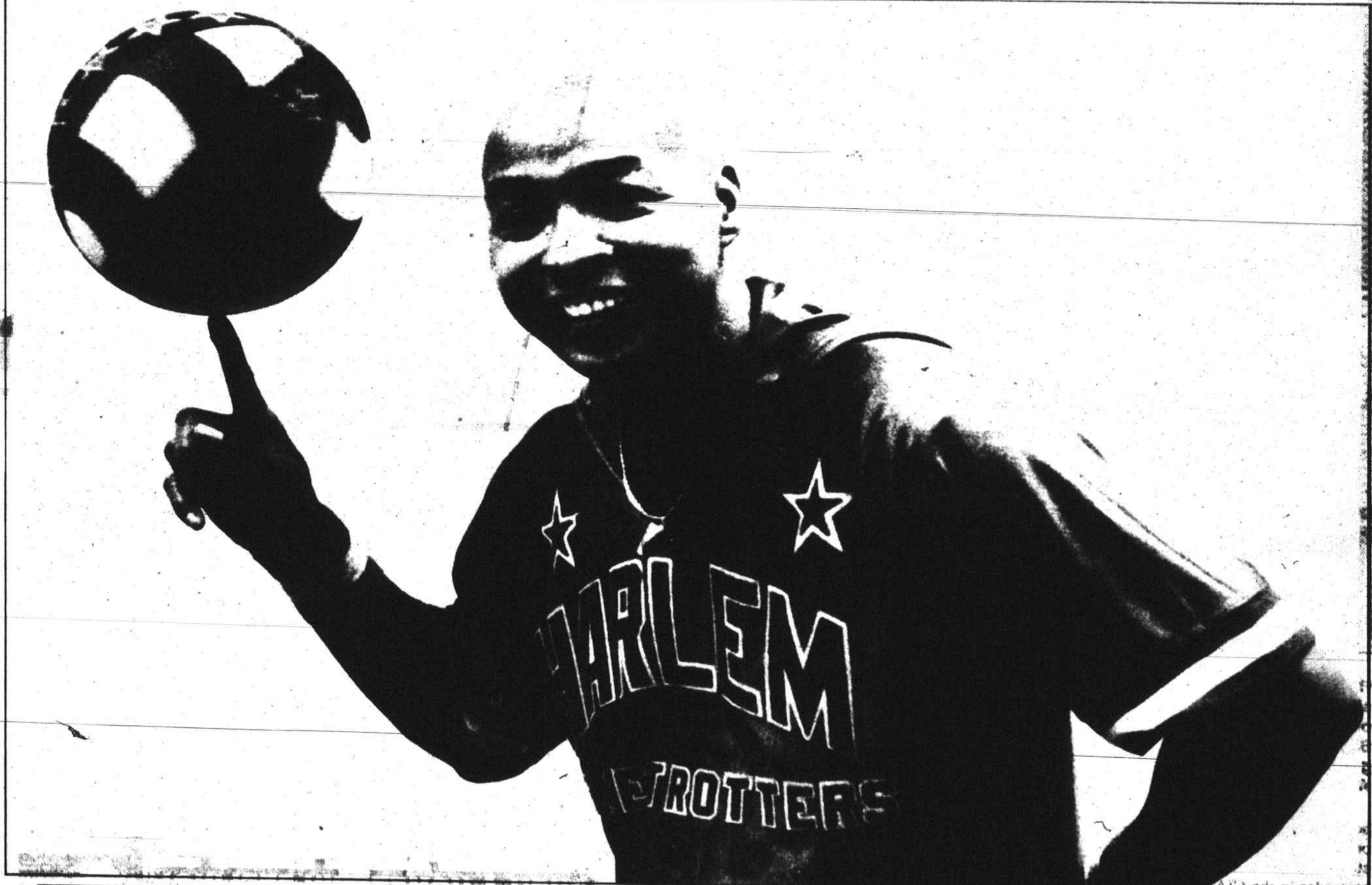
Neal: Working with the Special Children's Home makes me

feel real special. The children at the home haven't been very fortunate. So I'm always happy to be part of something that makes them happy, that helps to cheer them up.

**Chronicle Sports:** It's been five years since you stopped playing with the Trotters and you enjoyed a lot of good years. Looking back, what would you say was your most memorable moment as

a player?

Neal: What I remember the most is just making the team and putting on the red, white and blue uniform to represent my country, all over the world. It took a lot of hard work and dedication, but I was able to make it. In try-out camp, there were 125 players from all across the country who competed for five spots on the team and I was one of the five.



**Chronicle Sports:** How did your involvement with the NBA come about after you called it career with the Globetrotters?

Neal: When moved my family to Orlando, Fla., I ran into Pat Williams who used to be the general manager for the Philadelphia 76ers. We always got together whenever the Globetrotters would go to Philly because we played at the Spectrum, which is the home arena for the Sixers.

Pat was interested in bringing an NBA franchise to Orlando and he felt I could help. I wound up doing a lot of promotional work as the honorary ticket chairman for the new franchise. The idea was to get as many people to buy tickets so that the NBA would know how interested the city was in having its own team.

I purchased the 7,000th ticket, which was significant because I played in 7,000 games with the Globetrotters. Two years after we started that campaign, the city had the franchise.

**Chronicle Sports:** As the Magic's Director of Special Projects, what are some of the things you get involved in?

Neal: One of the major projects I deal with is the NBA's Stay In School Program. I've set up the program for the Magic which includes about 45 schools in the two counties surrounding Orlando. I go out with some of our top players to visit those schools. We stress the importance of making intelligent choices and getting an education. We gear our efforts for the younger kids (in middle schools) because they are an age that can either make or break them.

**Chronicle Sports:** The NBA players undoubtedly get a lot of adoration from the kids on those visits. How do they respond to you?

Neal: Actually, I get as much or more applause than they guys who are playing the game today.

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