



FINDING MIELO

NBA SUPERSTAR CARMELO ANTHONY RECONNECTS WITH HIS HERITAGE THROUGH CHARITABLE FEATS AND BY FILMING A DOCUMENTARY ON HIS LATE FATHER'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO A PUERTO RICAN REVOLUTIONARY GROUP.

By Jesús Triviño Alarcón



The Carmelo Anthony Foundation helps bring education and recreation to underprivileged communities.

Carmelo Anthony is on a mission. He's had it in mind since he entered the NBA in 2003. Yet *this* goal—to build sports venues for kids in tough neighborhoods—doesn't culminate with a ticker-tape parade for his New York Knicks. Since 2010 Anthony's charity, the Carmelo Anthony Foundation, has restored three basketball courts in his late father's homeland of Puerto Rico and also held various fund-raising events such as celebrity softball and golf games on the island. Last summer the foundation renovated its third court in Bayamón, and the basketball player has said he looks forward to revamping more of Puerto Rico's courts in the near future.

"I started Courts 4 Kids in the Baltimore area in 2006, and it clicked: 'Why don't I do it in Puerto Rico?'" says

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the boricua and African American superstar athlete, whose New York Knicks are competing in the NBA playoffs this month. "I did my first one in La Perla [a rough neighborhood in San Juan] and everybody was looking at me like, 'How could you possibly do a court over there, with the drugs and the violence?' To me it was a no-brainer. As a kid, basketball gave me hope. So to be able to provide sports facilities in underprivileged neighborhoods now is incredible."

Born in Brooklyn and raised from age 9 in an area of Baltimore called the Pharmacy—not unlike the drug- and gang-ridden setting of the HBO drama *The Wire*—Anthony knows what it's like to come from a less fortunate background. When Anthony was two, his father, Carmelo Iriarte, succumbed to liver cancer, leaving his mother, Mary, a housekeeper, to raise four children by herself.

"My mother is a strong-willed person," says Anthony, 28, who has two brothers and a sister on his mother's side and four sisters and a brother on his father's. "She always preached education to me."

Before he attended his only year at Syracuse University, where he led the Orange to its only NCAA championship, Anthony's mother gave him a notebook of poems written by his father. The poetry, which largely revolved around Iriarte's love of the ladies, sparked the son's interest to learn more about his father. With the

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help of his family, Anthony started to piece together the puzzle of who Iriarte was. Then an old friend of his father's sent him a picture that prompted even more questions.

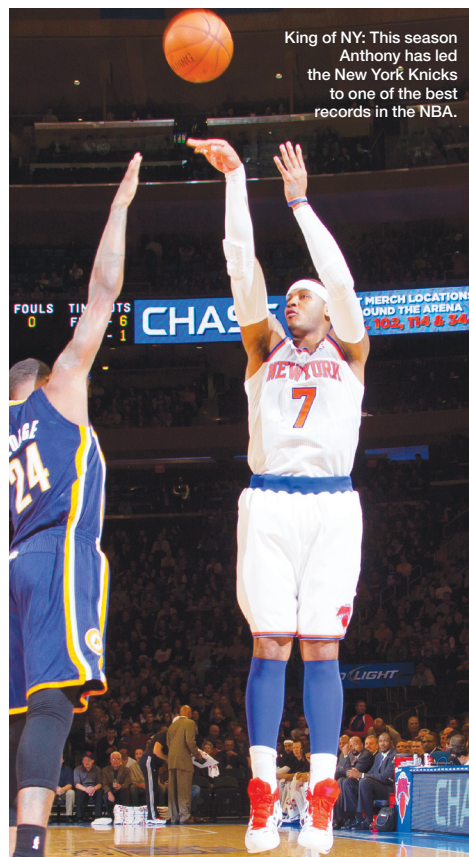
"In the picture my dad was with four or five black guys locked up in upstate New York," he says. "I found out that those guys were Black Panthers. Then a friend of mine gave me a book for my birthday called *Palante* [a detailed history of the Young Lords, a militant Puerto Rican civil rights group]. So I'm reading the book and it says that some of them were locked up in upstate New York. As it turns out my dad was one of the Young Lords that were sent upstate," says Anthony, who declined to give details on his father's incarceration.

The New York chapter of the Young Lords was inspired by the Black Panthers, the militant African American group, and founded by a group of mainly college-aged Puerto Ricans in 1969 with the goal of aiding their disenfranchised community. In December of that year the group occupied the First Spanish Methodist Church in Spanish Harlem for 11 days, providing free meals and clothing, health care and other services.

Anthony's discovery of his father's involvement with the group, which took him five years to uncover through talks with his mother and sisters, led him to develop the documentary *Looking for a Lord* through Krossover Productions, which Anthony co-owns with his wife, reality star La La. The company has already produced one critically acclaimed documentary (2008's *Tyson*, about the former heavyweight boxing champion), but this project is of course more personal.

"I shot it with [Young Lords cofounder] Felipe Luciano and some of his partners. I'm in front of the First Spanish Methodist Church in Harlem, and Lincoln Hospital. So we're going through a lot of the organization's history," Anthony says of the film, which has no release date yet. "Felipe is actually narrating it, so I'm more of the interviewer. This is something I really want to bring awareness to."

While Iriarte never saw his son shoot his first basketball, Anthony



King of NY: This season Anthony has led the New York Knicks to one of the best records in the NBA.

makes sure he's there for every step his 6-year-old mini-me, Kiyan, takes.

"He's an amazing father," La La says of her husband. "I think a lot of it has to do with the fact that his father passed away when he was very young. Sometimes I feel left out! I'm like, 'You guys are always doing boy stuff!' But I love that they have that relationship."

Anthony says his bond with La La is stronger than ever. The Puerto Rican power pair, who have been together for almost a decade, maintain a sturdy union through Skype and constant communication when Anthony's games take him on the road approximately 100 days out of the year.

"We support each other," Anthony says. "When we're with each other, we have fun. When she has to work, she has to work. When I have to work, I have to work. I don't think I would like someone just at home waiting for me—I love an independent woman, she loves being independent, and I think that's what makes it work."



SCAN this page for Carmelo Anthony's favorite Puerto Rican things.
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