

Crane: the responsibility of telling undercovered stories

The Nike Hoop Summit provides unique opportunities for student journalists — especially on the women's side

By Lily Crane



Photos by Jonathan Suni

Over a dozen media members and NBA scouts filed through the glass doors at the Coach Krzyzewski Fitness Center as Team World's practice finished. Soon-to-be Hall of Famer, Carmelo Anthony, stood on the opposite side of the gym to watch his son, Kiyon, practice the afternoon before the 2025 Nike Hoop Summit. Cameras followed the father-son duo.

Meanwhile, the Team USA women's squad began to take the court for their practice session. By the time the clock on the far wall hit 1 p.m., the media were all gone.

I sat with my pen and notepad next to about half a dozen family members. What was a gym full of credentialed press minutes before had only me, Saturday's television analyst — LaChina Robinson — and one other journalist remaining.

The Nike Hoop Summit has been a key part of my journalistic journey. It's an annual event held in Portland, Ore., which showcases the top high school basketball players in a game between Team USA and Team World. In my three years of covering the event, I've learned what sports coverage looks like outside of my little Eugene bubble, I've grown more comfortable interviewing big-name athletes and most importantly, I've discovered more about my role as a media member covering women's sports.

I'll never forget my first Nike Hoop Summit two years prior. It was the first event I ever traveled to cover during my first year as a writer for The Daily Emerald.

I vividly remember walking up to Bronny James (who's now rostered by the Los Angeles Lakers) to find out if I could ask him a question after practice. "I don't think I'm allowed to talk right now," he responded. Every time James was available for media, press members swarmed him with microphones. Media, NBA scouts, agents and basketball royalty fill the bleachers at Team USA men's practices year after year.

It's not the same story on the women's side.

The same year that James denied my interview request in a crowded practice gym, I was shocked to realize that I could walk up to USC commit Juju Watkins for a one-on-one interview. Watkins wasn't a household name then like she is now, but I knew that the former No. 1 recruit was the real deal.

I felt unqualified to be the lone media representative at the women's practices at just 19 years old and as someone still fresh to sports journalism. I didn't think I belonged at the men's practices either, a space dominated by male media members.

My feelings have changed in my third year of covering the event. There are still very, very few media members at the women's practices, which makes every opportunity to introduce new basketball talents to fans that much more important.

Last weekend, I spoke to the top three recruits in the 2025 class: Jazzy Davidson (USC), Sienna Betts (UCLA) and Aaliyah Chavez (Oklahoma). It became clear to me why these three are at the top of their class. Their determination, basketball IQ and obvious talent set them apart from the majority of youth basketball players.

March and April are when the high school basketball season ends, and events like the Hoop Summit and the McDonald's All-American Game allow the chance for these athletes to play with and against each other before they take the step to the next level.

“It's really good people constantly, and the coaches are always pushing you, and it's just really, really difficult, and that's why these experiences are so important,” Betts said. “It's the best way to prepare because the speed, and it's difficult and it's really tiring.”

These events aren't just important opportunities for female stars to showcase their talent to scouts and play against more challenging opponents, though, as it is on the men's side. It's another step in the journey of building women's sports — and the youth side of the equation still has a lot of work to do. Take the Nike Hoop Summit, for example, which started back in 1995 for men and just in 2023 for women.

“I think we're building [the] women's program in general, women's basketball, just because you don't see a lot of girls coming out here and hooping — this is only the third, but they've been doing it for a while with the boys,” Chavez said. “This just shows that we're building women's basketball.”

I spoke to Gamecocks forward Joyce Edwards in 2024, who recently excelled in the NCAA Women's Final Four to reach the title game with South Carolina. She echoed a similar sentiment about the progression in women's basketball in the middle of a viewership boom after a record-breaking NCAA Tournament last year.

“The talent was always there,” Edwards said. “People are just now seeing it.”

I consistently think about my conversations with Watkins, Edwards and others when I watch them thrive in college throughout the year. Other media members jump at the opportunity to speak with the top male prospects, but it typically takes a couple of years for their names to appear in front-page headlines. It only takes about six months for the young women who appear in the Nike Hoop Summit to become household names among women's basketball fans.

What if there were a women's Nike Hoop Summit when Breanna Stewart finished high school? What if it existed in the days of Candace Parker, Diana Taurasi, Sue Bird and even Sheryl Swoopes? So many of the game's greatest never had the opportunities that players have now.

The evolution in coverage and opportunities for female athletes is still progressing in the direction of equity. My experiences at the Nike Hoop Summit have molded my purpose

as a journalist. No media member is too young or too fresh to cover the stories that have yet to be amplified.

I hope that the Nike Hoop Summit is an event that I can return to Portland to cover for years to come. Being able to say I witnessed Cooper Flagg (the 2025 No. 1 NBA draft prospect) and AJ Dybantsa (the No. 1 recruit in the high school class of 2025) play in high school years down the line, when they have successful NBA careers, would be cool bragging rights. I think being able to say I covered the inaugural women's game and was there to see the year-by-year growth in women's basketball at the event would be even more meaningful.