

# To Air is Human

By Reg P. Wydeven  
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When I was in seventh grade, I had two heroes: my dad and Michael Jordan. I wanted to grow up to be a lawyer by day and an NBA star by night. Well, one out of two isn't bad.

I'll never forget that for my 13th birthday, I got a Michael Jordan replica jersey and Chicago Bulls tear-away warm-up pants. I felt like the coolest guy ever when I walked in the halls at school wearing them. Apparently some of the ninth graders didn't think I looked quite so cool. I learned very quickly to wear a pair of basketball shorts under the tear-away pants.

But the coolest component of the ensemble was the Air Jordan sneakers. I had the black pair with the red swoosh. I felt sure I could run faster and jump higher when I wore them. I've had several more pairs of Jordans since seventh grade, including the limited edition 1992 Olympic Dream Team pair, and I always felt cool wearing them.

Well, I'm not the only boy who grew up with his dad and Michael Jordan as heroes. One young man, however, killed two birds with one stone. Marcus Jordan also looks up to Michael Jordan, and he just so happens to be his dad, too.

Like me and most of my friends, Marcus expresses his admiration for Michael by wearing Air Jordans. In seventh grade, I remember how shocking it was that Air Jordans were the first sneakers that cost over \$100. While they were expensive, Marcus' pair of Jordans may cost \$3 million.

Marcus plays basketball for the University of Central Florida. In last week's exhibition game against Saint Leo, Marcus wore a pair of Air Jordans. The problem is, UCF entered into a contract in 2005 with sportswear company Adidas, which provides the University with approximately \$1.9 million worth of apparel and shoes, but requires the school's athletes to wear Adidas gear exclusively.

Because of the unusual circumstances, UCF officials notified Adidas when they began recruiting Marcus. Regional Adidas representatives agreed to allow Marcus to wear his dad's shoes, even though they're made by Nike. When higher ranking officials learned of the arrangement, however, they nixed the deal, and purportedly will not be signing the six-year, \$3 million extension of the existing contract that expires this year.

Like many universities, UCF relies on Adidas' sponsorship deal to make ends meet in the athletic department. Since the 1980s, corporate sponsorships of university athletic programs have become a major source of revenue for colleges across the country. Some experts believe that sports sponsorship agreements, like UCF's with Adidas, can generate as much as \$5 million or even \$10 million in free clothing, shoes and cash, and can even compare to the amount it takes in from tuition.

But like UCF's deal, the sponsor requires athletes and coaches alike to wear their apparel exclusively. When James Keady, an assistant soccer coach at St. John's University, refused to wear Nike apparel because he objected to the company's treatment of its employees, he alleged he was forced to resign. Keady sued Nike and St. John's, who shared a multi-million dollar contract, but his lawsuit was dismissed.

Pro athletes have no such restrictions. That's why Michael Jordan showed loyalty to Nike by draping an American flag over the Reebok logo on his warm-up during the Dream Team's medal ceremony in the 1992 Olympics, even though the company sponsored the team.

It's probably for the best that I didn't make the NBA. After all, who would buy shoes called Ground Wydevens?

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