

## Basketball Junkie

Can basketball really shape one's work ethic?  
Brian Sommer is living proof that it can.

**B**rian Sommer rarely watches an NBA game anymore, but he can't get enough college basketball. "I love the emotions, the crowds; it's a different game," he says. He received a full basketball scholarship to Valparaiso University in Valparaiso, Ind., which he attended from 1989 to 1993. He graduated with a degree in finance.

After serving in various sales-related positions for Baxter Scientific Products and VWR Scientific Products, he was recruited by MMS President Gary Reeve

in July 2003 to start the company's Industrial Division. The division sells supplies for clean room, production and sterile environments to manufacturing facilities in the pharmaceutical, medical device, biotechnology and semiconductor industries. The company's industrial division also serves as the sales arm for its sister company, Legacy Packaging, which offers contract packaging and filling for its customers.

*Repertoire* spoke with Sommer recently about basketball and medical sales.

Shown is Brian Sommer,  
No. 14.



**Repertoire: Why basketball?**

**Brian Sommer:** Sports are a big part of what our family does. I played football, basketball and baseball growing up, and played all three in high school. But my first love was always basketball. I dreamed of playing Division 1 ball, and I set a goal early to work to get there.

**Rep: Talk about a great coach of yours.**

**BS:** I played high school basketball at Boylan Central Catholic High School in Rockford, Ill. It has a very distinguished level of sports success and has produced a ton of college athletes. There, I was fortunate to play for a great teacher, motivator and coach, Steve Goers. (With a 562-142 record since joining Boylan Central in 1980), he's the second winningest coach in Illinois high school basketball history. He demanded commitment to making ourselves better every day. Beginning in summer, open gyms weren't optional; they were mandatory, three days a week.

**Rep: At Valparaiso, you settled into the point guard position. What does it take to be a good point guard?**

**BS:** Being a point guard is about leadership, taking care of the ball and making sure the team is doing what it should.

**Rep: What was it like to compete at Division 1 level?**

**BS:** It was a great experience. The travel, the competition and the free education were exceptional. Since all college athletics are very competitive, every loss really hurt. You learn that no matter what you felt like on a day-to-day basis, you needed to try to get better every single day.

I competed against a lot of people who later played in the NBA, including Nick Van Exel (currently with the Portland Trail Blazers) and Tony Bennett (who played for the Charlotte Hornets from 1992 to 1995, and is now associate head coach for men's basketball at Washington State University). Having to guard Bennett was the most difficult thing I had to do. If you guarded him, you were a marked man. You would get

**The Sommer File**

Born and raised: Northern Illinois

Age: 34

Company: MMS (Earth City, Mo.)

Claim to fame: College basketball point guard

College height/weight: 6 feet, 2 inches/190 pounds

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hit with 10 screens. By the end of the game, you were exhausted and beaten up.

**Rep: Was it difficult to keep up academically while playing basketball?**

**BS:** I had more problems staying focused when we were out of season. The reason was that during the season, my day was structured. That might not work for some people, but for me, it did. Basketball practice always started in the afternoon, so I took all my classes in the morning or early-afternoon. After practice, I would eat and go straight to the law library, which was near my apartment. They tolerated no distractions there. I would get my work done, then move on.

And Valparaiso was active in making sure everyone was on a track to graduate. I always stayed for summer school, so I wouldn't have to carry such a heavy load during the season, and so I could graduate in four years. I look back at the people who were my teammates. Some are orthodontists and doctors. I realize I was fortunate to play with people who had a truly rounded college experience. And that's hard to do in Division 1.

**Rep: Why did you get into sales after college?**

**BS:** I was a finance major, and I realized early on that sitting in a bank wasn't for me. It seemed like the clock stood still. [A career in] sales was interesting to me due to the pace, the competition and the pay potential. I thought I could excel due to my organizational skills, drive for success, competitiveness and work ethic. The opportunity to have a high-intensity job that allowed me to interact with people was also a draw. And my father has always been in sales or sales management. He is in the machine tool business; he sells anything to do with metal shaping and forming.

**Rep: You have spent much of your sales career selling products to manufacturers**

Brian with A.J. (left) and Adam.



**of medical products and pharmaceuticals. Can you draw any parallels between sales and basketball?**

**BS:** Business today is about as competitive as you can get, especially in distribution. You need to find things that differentiate yourself from your competition. You need to find niches that make it more likely you'll have the success you're targeting. And you know that when you're going after new business or trying to protect existing business, every day is competition. If what you're doing isn't working, you need to find a new way to do things.

It's the same thing in sports: If you're winning, you try to stick with what's working, but you still try to get better. And when you're losing, you have

to find a way to get off better shots, rebound better and stop turning the ball over. That's the similarity between sports and sales.

The other thing is this: Anyone who plays college sports knows there are days when you feel better than others. Still, you had to "go to work" every afternoon, whether you felt like being there or not. I'm not saying it was a job, but it's not all glamour and games. The person I respect the most among my teammates is now a podiatrist. He's about 6-feet, 11-inches tall. And he walked on. The people who walk on and put themselves through that hard work are probably some of the more successful people when they graduate. To put yourself through that because you love it is amazing. **TE**