

## Granger makes lasting memories for youth in basketball camp



A superhero enthusiast, Granger dons a Batman mask while posing with one of his basketball campers. (James Morris/Pacers)

**By James Morris** | Albuquerque, N.M., July 25, 2008

When Danny Granger was growing up near New Orleans, he didn't have the opportunity to go to a basketball camp. So, when he was drafted No. 17 by the Pacers from New Mexico in 2005, he vowed to give back to the youth in Albuquerque in a way that no other professional basketball player had previously: his very own basketball camp.

Now in its third year, the Granger's camp offers boys and girls ages 7-17 the chance to get one-on-one instruction from local high school players, former and current UNM players, international professional athletes and, last but not least, Granger himself. Campers learn everything from basic ballhandling skills to learning assignments on set plays.

Granger starts the day at 9 a.m. by greeting the campers, giving them their morning pep talk and warming them up with some stretching and running before the real work begins. The youngsters work on their dribbling and passing skills with three- and five-man weaves, shooting drills, layup drills and shooting games.

On the last two days, they scrimmage to determine the best team in their age groups (dubbed Pac 10 for the youngest, then D-League and NBA as the players advance in age). "They can learn with kids in their own age groups," Granger said, "so they don't feel intimidated by other kids who may be more advanced than they are."

What makes this camp different is Granger is actually there all day every day and he can often be seen participating in drills, contests and games with the kids. It is not uncommon to see him pull a youngster aside to demonstrate the proper execution of the pick-and-roll or to hear him shout "good shot" for extra encouragement. You might also find him taking time out to walk a camper to the trainer's office for a little ice, now and then.

Along the way, he makes long-lasting memories.

“Danny is my friend,” said one camper, “because he asked if he could be on my team.”

Granger is a star who doesn't think of himself as a star. When one parent heard him saying he had to go lift weights and work out after the camp, she said she felt sorry for him because he already had a hard day. “Don't feel sorry for me,” Granger said, “I love to work out.” With the youngsters all watching his every move, the comment couldn't have been better if it had been scripted.

Granger understands that sometimes an encouraging word or a show of compassion can mean a lot to a youth. The light that shines in the campers' eyes after getting a compliment from their favorite basketball player is a sight that would melt even the coldest of hearts. With Granger stepping up his game on the court and poised to lead the Pacers in just his fourth season, fans can feel comfortable knowing the new leader of the team is also taking a leadership role when it comes to community involvement.

*The senior basketball editor for Fanball.com, James Morris doubles as Pacers.com's resident fantasy basketball expert, providing exclusive weekly forecasts during the regular season.*

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