

● Leader profile with Chris Anstey

# SLAM DUNK

STORY | Emma Ryan

As an accomplished professional basketball player, he is known for his determination and drive. *The Adviser* shoots the breeze with **Chris Anstey** as he shares how he went from being a young boy with a dream to a globally recognised leader in his own right

“YOU NEVER know who’s watching” - that was a lesson learnt early on by basketballer turned businessman, Chris Anstey.

Chris’ sporting career was turned on its head at age 17 after being spotted by a scout at one of his local weeknight games. Since then, the now 40-year old has accomplished great feats, dominating in the NBL, NBA and the Olympics.

But there’s more to this sports star than meets the eye. He’s also a father of three with a love of business projects and anything to do with encouraging today’s youth.

He told *The Adviser* that it hasn’t

always been easy. He’s faced a few setbacks during his career, however it’s been his persistence and ability to surround himself with uplifting and hardworking people that has got him to where he is today.

#### In a nutshell

Although known for his skills on the basketball court, Chris first had dreams of becoming a professional tennis player.

“I played tennis from six to 17 years old, which really helped me develop skills that would help me in any sport - footwork, perception, touch and self-motivation,” he says.

“My dream was to play at Wimbledon, however I realised at 17 years old that it was becoming an unrealistic dream.”

Instead of giving up on that dream of elite sportsmanship, the seven-foot-tall Chris took the setback in his stride, turning his attention to a new sport - basketball. He was quickly noticed by a scout from the Melbourne Tigers Basketball Club, at which point Chris put his mind to becoming the best of the best.

“I didn’t realise I had been given an opportunity, but when presented with it, wanted to run with it,” he recalls.

“I realised, however, that I needed to spend significantly more time working on all aspects of my game to catch up to others, and did so immediately.

“My daily routine away from team training usually involved between two to four extra hours of shooting, lifting and learning. I played for the Melbourne Tigers NBL team 18 months later.”

The rest, as they say, is history. Chris spent one season with the Tigers and was then signed by South East Melbourne Magic, where he remained until 1997 before being selected as number 18 overall in the 1997 NBA Draft by the Portland Trail Blazers in the US.

He was signed by the Dallas Mavericks from 1997-99 and the Chicago Bulls from 1999-2000, before returning to the NBL to play for the Victoria Titans in 2001-02.

Chris was also a member of the Australian Boomers, competing in the 2000 Sydney Olympics and again at the 2008 Beijing games.

Around these two Olympic appearances, Chris played for Russian club PCB Ural Great Perm and UNICS Kazan the following year, before returning to his original team, the Melbourne Tigers, in 2006. He then retired from the sport in 2010.

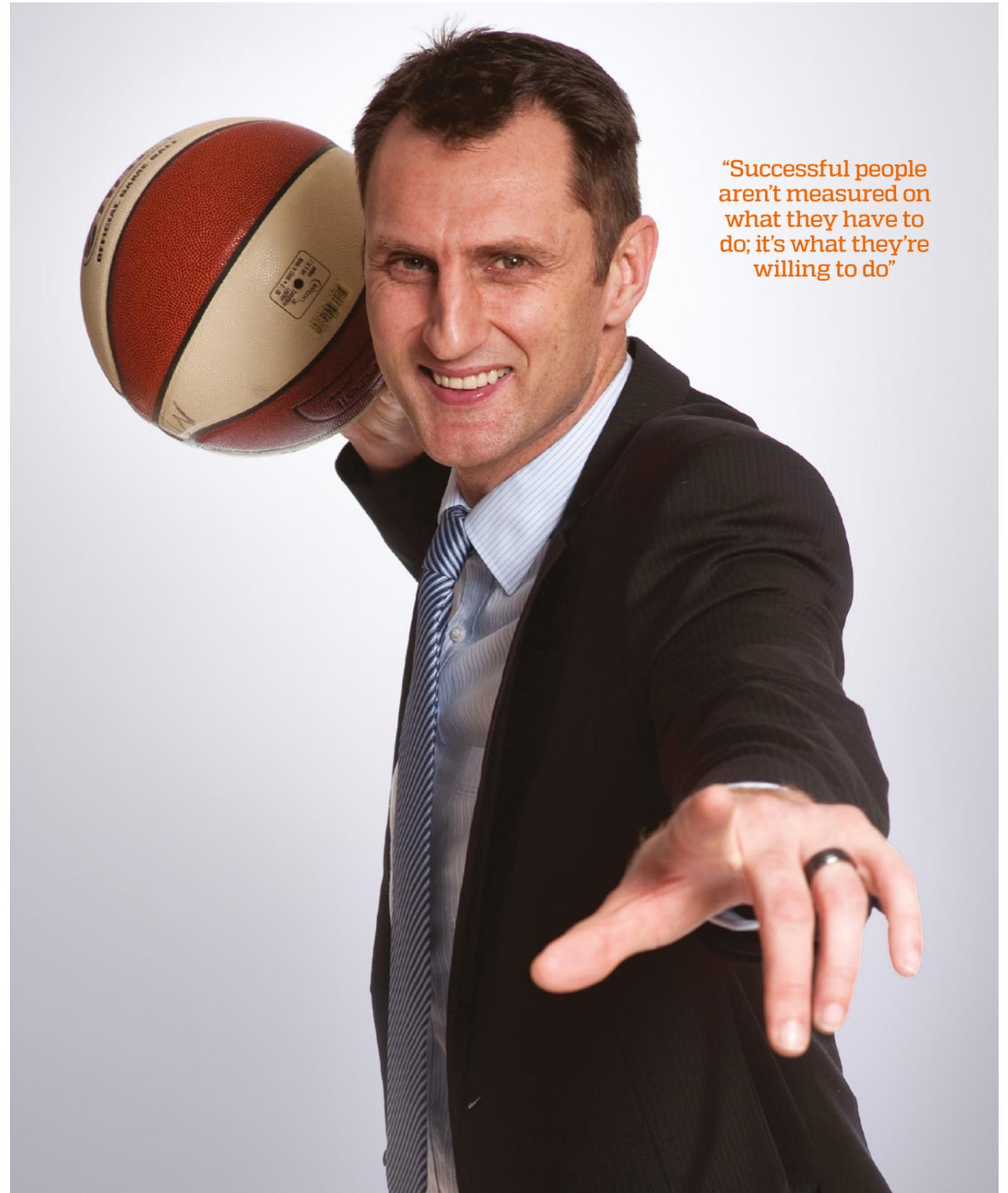
After a whirlwind international sporting career, Chris now spends his days coaching the next generation of sporting stars at Caulfield Grammar.

He also works for event marketing company, A Positive Move, and does corporate appearance work with Melbourne City Hyundai. Chris was also recently named as a company ambassador for La Trobe Financial.

To be successful in any career, Chris says you need willpower.

“Your body quits a split second after your mind tells it to,” he insists. “Not many people will discover the best possible version of themselves because they make safe decisions.

“Take chances, work harder than your current definition of hard work and set high goals.”



“Successful people aren’t measured on what they have to do; it’s what they’re willing to do”

### Personal vs team goals

For many leaders, personal goals and team goals can be difficult to balance.

“I’ve always believed the group success comes before the individual’s,” Chris says. “I think the individual opportunities and success will come due to the fact that you’ve been part of a successful team.

“For me, it’s about drilling back to behaviours and habits, figuring out how good each individual can be and collectively impact the group.”

In order to achieve your personal goals in a team environment, Chris says you need to ensure you have the right people - whose goals align with your own - surrounding you.

“You can teach the right people any skill. You can’t teach the wrong people the right personality, loyalty, honesty and ingenuity,” he says.

“Go and find a few people who share similar goals, and work towards them together - achieving goals by yourself is near on impossible.

“I don’t think any leader can be solely responsible for making sure everyone achieves their goals.

“It’s a matter of making sure that you find like-minded people with similar goals and place them around each other to encourage a working relationship where they challenge each other,” Chris says.

### Building a business

Aspiring leaders working their way up the ladder shouldn’t forget the basics, according to Chris.

“Don’t try too hard, just be yourself. I think insincerity shows and I think you just can’t be all things to all people,” he says.

“You need to be able to delegate well, you need to be able to understand where you’re not great in areas and give someone an opportunity who is great in that area to lead.”

Chris says having the right attitude is the key to becoming a successful leader.

“There are times where you come across a lack of motivation, but there’s not ever any time that I can remember where I ever wanted to quit,” he says. “It’s unusual that everybody in a group is struggling at the same time and by having the



**NOTABLE AWARDS**

- NBL’s Most Improved Player - 1996
- FIBA 22 & Under World Champion - 1997
- FIBA 22 & Under World Championships MVP - 1997
- NBL Best Sixth Man - 2001-02
- Gaze Medal winner - 2002
- NBL Best Defensive Player - 2008

right people around you, you’ve almost got an insurance policy that they’ll give you support and they’ll continue to bring you along to where you need to be, and vice versa.”

Putting value on your team is just as vital when building a business as it is during a game, Chris explains.

“It’s about creating a sense of inclusiveness and valuing what everybody does. Get to know [your staff] away from work and understand what’s important to them so you can set about helping them achieve that.”

Chris suggests the best thing any aspiring leader can do is adopt similar principles to other leaders they admire.

“The best [coaches] I ever had [were] Brian Goorjian and Des Middleton. Des Middleton was my junior coach and the best thing that he could do was make me feel included in the group, because it was a new sport and I was very uncomfortable.

“He made me feel welcomed and made it fun.

“When people ask about [NBL coach] Brian Goorjian, they ask what

his best quality was. He had this ability to make every single person who played for him feel like the most important player in the team and, no matter what he taught you, you bought in because you knew he was on your side - there was nothing selfish about that,” Chris says.

Chris took what he learnt from these two coaches to help guide him through his professional life - lessons he still applies today.

“For me, it’s about having that empathy with every single player in the team or every single employee in the group to let them know that you care,” he says. “Successful people aren’t measured on what they have to do; it’s what they’re willing to do.”

### Looking to the future

Having so many projects means every day is different for Chris.

Above everything, though, he aims to create a healthy work-life balance - something that many aspiring leaders can relate to.

“As a father of three beautiful children, I am always busy. [My goal is] to achieve a great balance between work and family by

trusting the values and lessons I’ve learnt over the years, [and] most importantly, surrounding myself with great people who inspire me, teach me and whose company I enjoy,” Chris says.

For the moment, he is looking forward to taking a hands-on approach at his new role with La Trobe Financial.

“Over the years, I’ve learnt that La Trobe Financial held very similar values to those I try to display. It’s been great sharing some of the lessons three decades in sport has taught me with La Trobe Financial’s clients, partners and staff, and discussing how these same lessons and observations parallel in the corporate world,” he explains.

Chris aims to continue living his life with no regrets, treating every failure as a lesson.

“There can be positive lessons learned in any situation. Too many people shield themselves and others from failure. I learned to embrace it, learn from it and use it as motivation... One injured body part creates an opportunity to strengthen others,” he says. ■