

# ALEX MAR

Jesuit High School/University of San Diego



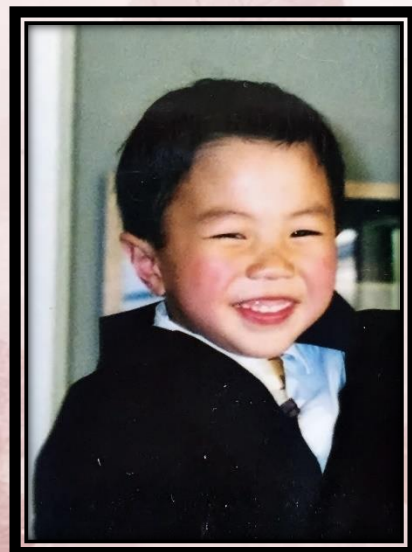
With all beginnings, there must come an ending. I've never particularly enjoyed the game of basketball. It's not that basketball is a boring game. It's just that it never really interested me when I played. I hated being dragged to practice every week to play a game that I never wanted to do. When I joined my Barons team in the seventh grade, I had some mixed emotions. While I wasn't looking forward to playing basketball for another five years, I was really excited by the fact that I was on a team with all my close friends. The two years I played on that team was a period constantly filled with those two emotions. Ultimately, in the ninth grade, I decided enough was enough. I did not want to leave my friends, but my dislike for basketball eventually won out. I was still close with my Baron brothers and I would occasionally watch some of their games. Never did I think that I would one day lace up my shoes and play again.

This past year, during the Warlords tournament, I heard my team was hit with several injuries. Ryan broke his ankle, Cameron tore a muscle in his shoulder, and Cody was just Cody. My boys were down to five players. My friends' parents texted and called me while I was at school trying to convince me to come out of retirement to play. Then, when I got home my phone buzzed again. This time, I looked at my phone and saw the name: Rod. I picked up the phone and knew he would be the only one to convince me to play. Rod reminded me the reason that the Barons play basketball. He told me that he didn't need me to play because the team needed to win. He told me I needed to play because the team needed me. I knew what Rod was saying was right and that weekend I suited up for the final time. I played with the people I with whom I began my journey. The same emotions came over me, but through the course of the weekend, they ultimately subsided. I simply enjoyed with being on the court with my friends again. I realized after all those years in hiatus that it wasn't about how playing basketball made me feel. It was how the people on that team made me feel.

Thank you, Mom, Dad, and Auntie Lily, for your constant love and support throughout the years. Thank you, Auntie Stacey, for being a second mom to me and always letting me stay at your house. Thank you Rod, Coach Marvin, and Coach Rich for helping keep the Barons going for future generations. Thank you, Coach Lane and Coach Jimmy, for leading our team through the years. Lastly, I want to thank the Barons organization as a whole, for being another family for me.

*"Cherish your yesterdays, dream your tomorrows and live your todays. The past is written in stone, while the future is still on the horizon. All we can hold onto is the present"*

-Alex Mar







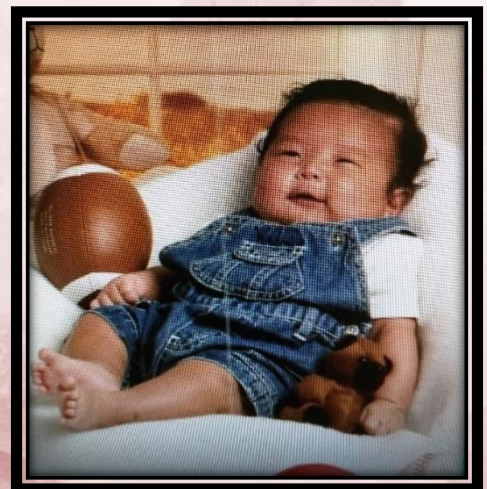
# BRAYDEN YOKOTA

J.F. Kennedy High School/ Arizona State University

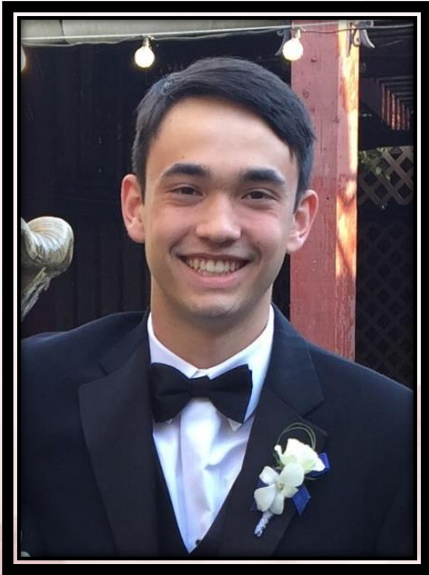
Joining the Barons Organization has probably been one of the best decisions I have made in my entire life. I've made so many memories with not only my team, but also the other teams my age. I have made some of the best friends that I could ever ask for, thanks to the Barons. I know my team and I will always be close and our bond will last our whole lives. It feels like yesterday that we were practicing at Sutter getting ready for the San Jose tournaments, but as B2B (Barons to Be) because we couldn't officially take the Barons name yet.

There are so many great memories with my team. One of my favorite memories has got to be at our first year Barons Camp where they brought in a hypnotist for us. It was the funniest thing in the world to watch as people were getting hypnotized to do the funniest of things, from walking down the runway as models, to being on the scariest roller coaster. It was one the best memories I made as a Baron. In a game though, my favorite memory has got to be when my dad got two technical fouls. The first one he received was for talking back to the referee, but the second one was the funniest technical I have ever heard. My dad said, "Holy cow" when the referee didn't call anything and immediately got a technical for it. At the time our team and the parents were upset about such a terrible technical foul but looking back now it was definitely one the funniest memories as a Baron. It's not just the big memories that will always be with me, but the little ones as well. I'm going to miss hanging out in the lobby at tournaments and hanging out with other teams. I'm going to miss going to someone's room so we could talk about random things until midnight. I will even miss getting in trouble by the parents for staying up too late. Even though no specific time stands out, it was always fun to just relax and be able to talk with my team. All these memories that I've made over the last 4 years as a Baron will stick for me forever.

To me being a Baron has never been about playing basketball and winning tournaments, but making new and amazing memories with your team. I will always cherish the memories I have made in these short 5 years as a Baron. I'll end this essay with a message to all the other younger teams. Being a Baron is about making the best memories you can with your family and maybe winning a few championships along the way.







# CAMERON DORAIS

J.F. Kennedy High School/UCLA

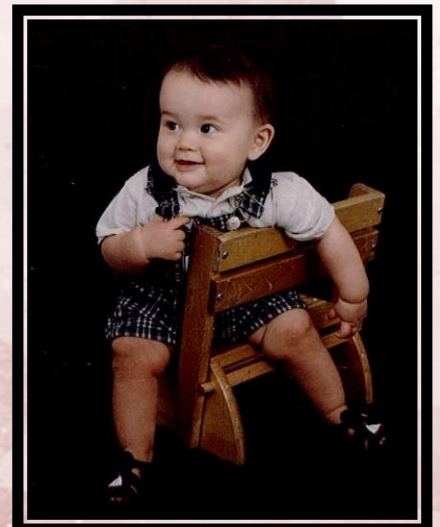
Many times over the course of the past 4-5 years, I have been asked by many people from outside of the Asian basketball community about what exactly is meant by being a Sacramento Baron. It is easy enough to tell them that a Baron is simply someone who is a member of a basketball club that plays in an Asian league. This is the short, general definition that I give to the people who wouldn't understand if I told them the whole truth. This explanation is very basic, and shares nothing about the true feeling of what it means to embody the Baron ideals. Being a Baron to me is living up to your full potential in life, whether it be by giving your all on the basketball court, working hard in school or your job, or doing something as simple as just being an overall respectful and decent person to your friends, family, and others.

After all these years, I have always enjoyed playing on this team with friends that I wouldn't replace for anybody else in the world. The memories we shared playing together and being together are moments that I will never forget. The Barons organization has a list of certain values which are the core tenets of the organization. My favorite value by far is FAMILY. Without family, we have nothing. Who else can we turn to when nothing goes right in our lives? I am very thankful for the undying support of my parents, brothers, grandparents and Aunties.

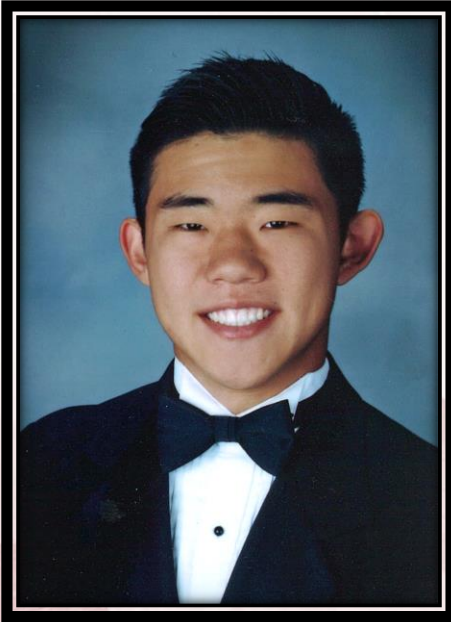
My teammates are also my family. We share the same blood, even though most of us aren't directly related. Creating the bonds with my teammates has been a process that will be impossible for me to repeat with any other group of people. On the court, we have become one unit in sync, working together to achieve goals that are bigger than any one person. We are friends, we are a team, and we are a family.

I would like to thank the Barons organization as a whole for its impact on me as a person. Under its influence, I have learned what it means to be a part of something more important than the wants and needs of myself. The coaches, parents, and other members have given me and my teammates endless support over the years and have helped us connect with all of the different age groups of the organization. I'd especially like to thank our coaches, Lane & Jimmy for all their time and effort to help us develop our basketball skills and create such a cohesive team. Most importantly, Barons has taught me that in order to help myself grow and the organization grow, I have to be committed. Whether this means giving continued support or helping the younger age groups grow and develop, I will always be committed.

Barons is an organization filled with many special people of all different backgrounds. We are all diverse, but we are united by our love and passion for basketball that has been nurtured throughout our time in this organization. I am sad this journey is almost over, but I am fortunate and proud to be able to wear "Barons" across my jersey for the final year. And I will keep with me all the great memories from my Barons years for the rest of my life.







# CODY KURAHARA

J.F. Kennedy High School/UC Davis

As an eighth grader, I never believed that one day my Barons journey would come to an end. Every year at camp, the seniors advised the younger generations to cherish each moment as a Baron, a fact that I took for granted. In middle school, my world revolved around basketball, soccer, video games, and hanging out with friends—I did not have time to worry about my senior year of high school. I could not fathom seeing myself as a senior, until one day I was giving the prompt, “What has being a Sacramento Baron meant to you?”

Today, I look in the mirror and still see that kid in middle school without a care in the world. This kid was not the best at basketball, but managed to get by. His career was stifled by a series of shoulder dislocations which sidelined him for several months at a time. But instead of giving in to injury, he kept his head up every step of the way and even found another sport to pursue to stay active. He followed the Baron values of “humility, commitment, leadership, discipline, sportsmanship, integrity, family, respect, team-first and work ethic” and forged a solid foundation on which he based his life. Now, at the end of the road, I can say that I am forever thankful for each and every moment the Sacramento Barons has provided me with.

To Coach Lane, Coach Jimmy and 2017 Parents:

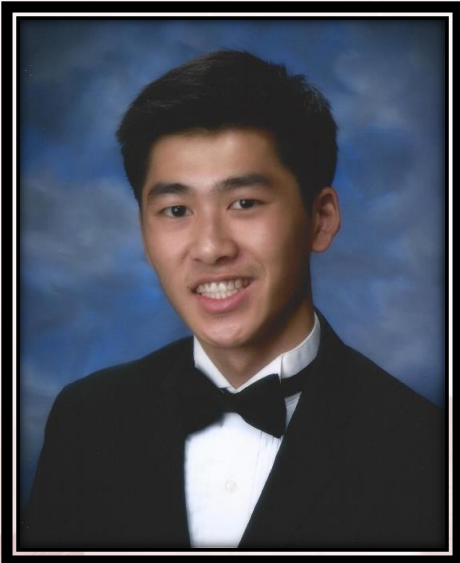
I never understood the amount of diligence it takes to coach a team of teenagers and drive us around, or pay for our food and lodging, until I looked back on it. You all made me see how a group of people could band together and become a family. I can now see the sacrifice that you all went through to sculpt a bustling team of teenage boys into cultured young adults who are ready to take the next step of life. Thank you, truly.

To My 2017 Barons:

In the back of my mind, I always knew that our paths would one day split up. No matter how far apart we are from one another, keep in mind that we hold bonds that transcend that of the game of basketball. You all are family, and I would not want to do it over without any of you.







# DILLON TAHARA

C.K. McClatchy High School/UC Irvine

Because I'm the youngest sibling and cousin in my family, I grew up watching all four of my cousins and sister go through the experience of being a Sacramento Baron. After every game that I watched them play as a Baron, it became more and more obvious that I too wanted to be part of the great Sacramento Barons organization. All their stories and memories about being a Baron inspired me to put all my efforts in becoming a part of the organization.

The past four years as a member of the Sacramento Barons Organization have been a memorable journey. Time really flies when I'm spending it with the people I care for and will cherish the rest of my life. First off, I would like to thank the Sacramento Barons Organization for giving me insight about how I should act in the real world. This organization is a special one and has so much more meaning to it than just an ordinary Asian basketball club. The organization brings together groups of girls and guys, of all ages, where each one of the players creates a bond with their team that can never be broken. From the outstanding coaches, to the supporting parents, to the amazing camps each summer, this organization does it all! I'd like to thank the Sacramento Barons organization for all the hard work that goes into the preparation that made it possible for me to enjoy the full Baron experience.

Throughout my basketball career, my family was always there to help and guide me along the way. From my loving parents, Randy and Denise Tahara, my older sister, Haley, to my supportive grandparents, uncles, aunts, and older cousins, they are the reason why I am the person I am today on and off the basketball court. I would like to thank my parents for driving me to all my games ever since I was little and for all that you do for me and the rest of our family. Becoming a Baron or even playing basketball wouldn't be possible without your commitment and support towards my passions. You're the main reason for my successes in school and in sports and I appreciate everything you have done for me. Also, I'd like to thank my Uncle Jeff for giving up his time for me to come over to his house to practice shooting, where he would critique my shot throughout the years.

My teammates have made my experience as a Baron a remarkable one. I am truly blessed to have gone through the process of growing up with such a great group of guys. Even though we never know how we win games, it isn't about winning that makes my experience, but the bonds and team chemistry that made it all worthwhile. They are my friends and brothers that I will keep in touch with for the rest of my life. It is always an amazing time when I get the chance to be around them and I'm truly grateful to have known and grown up with them. I'd like to thank Coach Lane & Coach Jimmy for giving up their time and teaching us the game. We couldn't be as successful as a team if it weren't for them AND all our great supportive parents who go the extra mile for us.

Even though my Barons journey is coming to an end, the connections I've made with my team and the rest of the organization will last a lifetime. I'm blessed to be a Sacramento Baron and I will continue to help the organization in any way I can. I can't believe it's my last year playing, but I'm hoping to make it a memorable one and who better to do it with than my teammates.







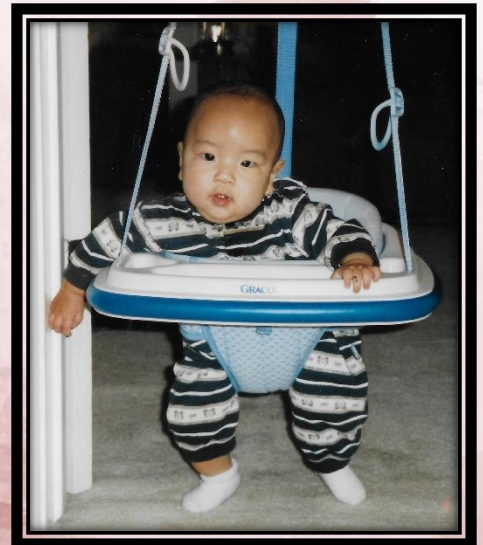
# NIK NISHIKAWA

J.F. Kennedy High School/University of Nevada, Reno

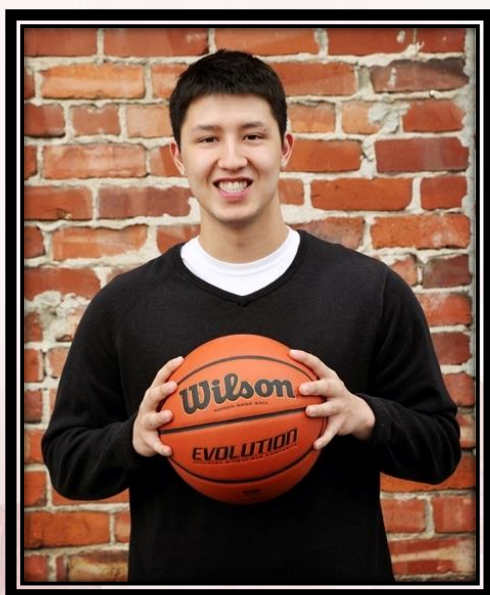
My experience as a Sacramento Baron has guided me into becoming the confident and respectful young man I am today by taking the values that the program instills into everything that I do.

Growing up as a Baron, I was taught early how to play basketball at a competitive level while still having fun. This idea has carried on throughout the years as an athlete in multiple sports. I learned early on how to stay in between the boundaries of having too much fun and being too competitive. In order to be competitive, I needed to practice. My team and I made our best efforts to make it to practice whenever we could and each time we would get better and better. With a small team, if one person was missing, the team would know exactly who it was. So, the practices became a sort of ritual that we went to regularly. The practices at times would seem long and endless, but the determination that we had overcame those thoughts. This determination has been a skill that the organization had taught me which would impact my sports, school, and work. Being a Baron helped me learn to socialize more than I was used to doing. The teams in the age divisions always play each other which meant having more “getting-to-know-you” moments. The different teams in the organization itself had given me even more opportunities to socialize with other age groups. I could even walk around my school knowing people just by being a Baron. But even if they weren’t a Baron, I was able to make new friends with the social skills that I had learned. And I had come into the organization with the humility value already, but as a Baron I was taught how to moderate my humility to an appropriate level which also taught me modesty. I’ll admit that I was a very active kid whose success was flaunted more than enough, but participating in the Barons organization and basketball itself, I’ve learned how to be graceful through a win or a loss.

The most important thing that the Barons organization did for me was teach me the skills and values that are easily transferable to my everyday life by making me a better athlete, worker and person.







# NIKO LEVITT

Lincoln High School-Stockton/Delta College

My Barons journey began on the day Mr. Kurahara handed my parents a folded slip of paper after one of our church basketball games against Sacramento Betsuin. Upon receipt of that paper the world of the Barons was opened up. We had heard of this organization but didn't think we would be able to be a part of it.

One of my fondest memories being a Baron was during a difficult time for one of our players. Dillon's grandfather was very ill during one of our tournaments. He passed away on the day of our game against the San Jose Ninjas. Our team was there for Dillon during this hard time. It was unclear whether or not he would play in the game against this team who beat us every game we've played.

As the game time grew near, we found out that Dillon would play. His grandpa would have wanted him to. Together as a team we played that game as a tribute to his grandpa. We ended up winning against this team that had always beaten us. We beat them for the first time and by 10! I felt that time brought our team closer.

Championship after championship, we haven't figured out exactly how we win. The only explanation is that we each know what our different strengths are and we contribute in different ways with a serious will to win. It's funny how people are amazed that we win so many tournaments. The coaching isn't so bad either...

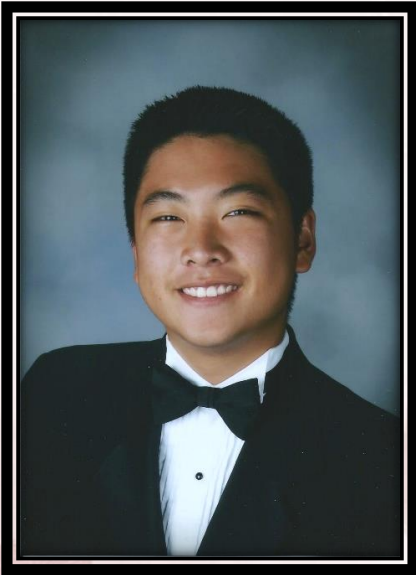
The parents of our team make it all possible. We would not be as successful as a team if it weren't for our parents. From fundraising, video-taping, photographing, traveling and being there to cheer us on (or yell at us), we are very thankful for their support. I can't imagine that the parents of the other teams would wash their uniforms for Sunday's game. Thank you for that.

Lastly, I can't write this reflection letter without mentioning the famous Sacramento landmark, Casa de Dorais. This was my home away from home. "Auntie" Stacey always made me feel welcomed and I had so much fun pulling all-nighters before our championship games. This place is filled with great memories that I will always treasure.

It's crazy how all this happened because of a tiny folded up piece of paper. The bond I've made with this team is unbreakable and these group of guys will forever hold a place in my heart.







# RYAN IKAMI

J.F. Kennedy High School/Sacramento City College

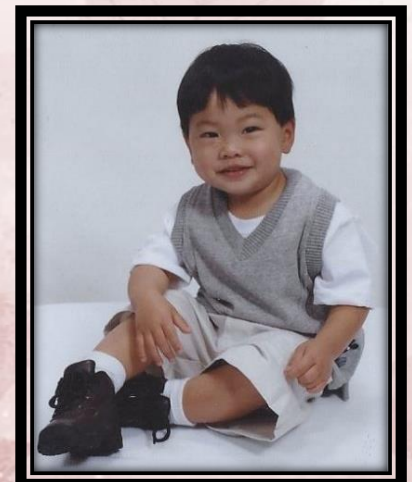
For the past 5 years, I have been so fortunate to be a part of the Barons Organization. Of all the choices that I have had to make in my life, the choice I made to play for my Barons team, has to be the best ever! The Barons family has taught me the many life values I use on and off the court. They have made me realize how simple words like integrity, respect, discipline, and family are not only used to be a good person, they are also values used to be a good athlete. I remember when I was younger, my brother (Keith) played for the Barons. Since I was only about 7 years old, I really didn't watch their games much, but I saw the friendships he made and how much fun he was having. That's when I decided that this was the organization I wanted to play for too. I committed myself to practice so I can grow up to be a Sacramento Baron. This organization is like a second family to me. The one thing I look forward to every year is Barons camp. Barons camp is one of the many memories I will always cherish. As a Baron, I have learned so much, experienced things that I would probably never had the nerve to do by myself, and made so many new friends that are now close enough for me to consider as my extended family. Teamwork and friendships are important to me and will be something that I can take with me in whatever direction my future holds.

My favorite memory of my Barons experience was a tournament when my team scored two buzzer beaters at the end of two different games, to win championship at that tournament. I can still watch the videos of those games and get excited every time I see it. I have learned that in a sport where the tallest people dominate, height is not everything. Being one of the shorter guys and having one of the smallest teams in our division, as long as our team works together we can still win games. My brothers on my team know each other so well, we can predict what each other are thinking and we work together as a team no matter what. I think we even surprise our coaches sometimes.

I would like to say thank you to all of the parents, coaches, and alumni that have supported our team through the years. I would like to give a big thanks to "The King" Rod for all that he does for the organization and for our team. I can't thank my parents enough for taking me to all my games, paying for the tournaments I play in, for taking care of me when I'm hurt, being my sideline coaches, and being my biggest supporters. Thank you to all of the coaches and alumni for keeping Barons camp running for so many years and it just gets better and better every year! I would also like to thank Coach Jimmy and Coach Lane for helping me improve as an individual and helping this team grow stronger. I also have a personal coach that I would like to thank because he's always there when I need him, I can call him when I have a problem with my shot and he can always help, and he's always there to tell me to pick up my head when we are down or when we lost. He's been there for me since I began play basketball and this person is my brother, Keith.

Lastly, I want to thank all my teammates (Class of 2017), you are all my brothers and sisters and I'll never forget the friendships that we have made over these years.

A piece of advice for all the younger players. Enjoy every moment of this because it will go by faster than you think. "Life is short. Time is fast. No replay. No rewind. So, enjoy every moment as it comes..."





# STONE SMARTT

Del Oro High School/Northern Arizona University



Playing with the Baron's 2017 team over the years has been a great experience. Even though I have not been able to participate 100% due to playing football and AAU, I am glad that I have been able to play in as many games as possible with my teammates. At first, I didn't think playing on another basketball team would benefit me in any way. However, after my first tournament with the Barons, I knew that it was

definitely going to be a much quicker pace and force me to play and learn a different position. The things that I will take away from this organization are the laughs on and off the court and the life-long friendships.

The support from my teammates, coaches, parents and the organization is something that I will always remember.

The Barons community has taught me a lot about who I am and where I come from. It's something I will never forget.

**Barons 2017 #100%!**

