

Pittsburgh Boomers

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Pitt Basketball Legend Now a Star In the Business World

*Long after trading Converse All-Stars for wing tips,
Curtis Aiken continues on successful path.*

By John Fries

On a recent Saturday afternoon, author San Sciullo stopped by the Borders store in Monroeville to discuss his newly published book about the history of basketball at the University of Pittsburgh, aptly titled, *Pitt: 100 Years of Pitt Basketball*. Making an appearance with Sciullo that day was a man who made history while playing for Pitt, while at the same time making Pitt basketball exciting to watch.

Curtis Aiken, considered a legend among local collegiate athletes, played guard at Pitt from 1983 to 1987. Recruited by then-head coach Roy Chipman, the six-foot Aiken left his native Buffalo, NY and moved to Pittsburgh, where he was the university's first McDonald's High School All-American

The numbers speak for themselves. With 1,200 career points, Aiken ranks 21st on Pitt's all-time scoring list. He also ranks among school leaders in steals, having tied the school's record with seven steals in a 1985 game against Syracuse. As a key recruit, he helped pave the way for Pitt's entry into the Big East, and in his senior year, he captained Pitt's Big East regular season championship team on its way to a 25-8 overall finish and 12-4 in the Big East.

Aiken remembers those days as a time of fun and self-discovery. "Coming to Pittsburgh and playing for Pitt was a great experience," he recalls. "The fun part was in finding out who we were. It's hard to be good at anything until you know who you are and what you're made of."

Part of what made it fun were his teammates. "There were lots of characters on the team," he says. One of them was Tico Cooper, a six-foot-seven power forward from Aruba. "He kept us laughing," says Aiken. "Once, during a practice session, we decided we were going to play around with Chipman. So we started playing street ball, doing alley-oops, putting the ball behind our backs, fancy dribbling--stuff like that. Well, the coach got angry and started yelling at us. So Cooper, who had a slight accent, goes up to the coach with both hands open and says (in an exaggerated accent), 'Coach, let your heart not be troubled.' At that point, we all started laughing and the coach realized we were just having fun with him."

Today, Aiken is using his leadership skills off the court. As co-founder (with partner Jason Matthews) and chief executive officer of eSGS, a downtown company, Aiken has spent the past seven years working with a variety of companies to help them procure goods and services, and, in so doing, saving money for them. The company's initials, he says, stand for "electronic suppliers of goods and services."

The company works primarily as a web-based resource (at www.esgs.net) that connects buyers with product and service providers via a reverse auction process in which vendors bid against other companies to win business. In the beginning, eSGS was instrumental in helping connect clients with qualified minority suppliers. They still do that when requested, but today, the focus is more on cost savings. The company continues to grow and has a client list that includes the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission, University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, Allegheny County and Eat'n Park.

One corner of Aiken's office is dominated by a large, framed, signed poster commemorating the famous Muhammad Ali-Joe Frazier 1971 fight at Madison Square Garden, along with a signed pair of Ali's trunks. Aiken, who once was also a Golden Gloves boxer, now enjoys being a spectator at athletic events. However, he notes that February's Pitt-WVU game was, in his words, "difficult to watch. The juices started flowing and I missed playing."

Comparing the past with the present, he says the most profound difference he sees is that today, "the guys are bigger, and the big men have more freedom to do more. When I played, we had on guy who could shoot a 15-footer. Now, everyone can do that."

Professionally, he is still in the game, working as an analyst on Fox Sports Television and co-hosting the Pitt Basketball post-game show. In his spare time, he coaches basketball, but the players are much smaller than those he encountered back in the day. A resident of Franklin Park in the North Hills, he coaches his daughter Alexis' sixth grade travel team at Ingomar Middle School and his six-year-old son Curtis Jr.'s YMCA league team. He jokes that his wife, Adrienne, says he should end his career there.

He doesn't disagree. An avid recreational golfer and devoted family man, Aiken says he now has "the best of all worlds."

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