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BURMA

Burma's Junior Basketball Players Get Tips from NBA Stars

By [LALIT K JHA / THE IRRAWADDY](#) | January 14, 2013 |

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NBA star Bradley Beal of the Washington Wizards poses for a picture with Burma's junior basketball team in Washington on Saturday, together with State Department official Tara Sonenshine and Burma's Ambassador to the US Than Swe. (Photo: Lalit J Kha / The Irrawaddy)

WASHINGTON—For Pone Min San, a grade 10 student from Rangoon, and an avid basketball player, any thought of visiting America and meeting top US basketball players was nothing but a day dream. Now, it's not any longer.

"It is a dream come true. I still do not believe that I am meeting the top basketball players and getting tips from them," Min San told The Irrawaddy this past weekend, moments after he met US basketball stars Bradley Emmanuel Beal and Kevin Seraphin, and retired basketball legend Dominique Wilkins.

"It is a big step for the future and building people-to-people relationships between Myanmar and the United States," said Min San, another player of the 12-member junior Burmese basketball team that is visiting the US on the invitation of the State Department.

The team, comprising players of 15 to 17 years of age, were offered a chance to meet with players of the Washington Wizards, a National Basketball Association (NBA) club on Saturday.

Later this week, Burma's young basketball talent will also visit North Carolina State to attend a Charlotte Bobcats game and to participate in a training clinic with the Bobcats' players and their manager Cho, who himself was born in Burma.

"This is an opportunity to increase our relationships through sports diplomacy," Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Tara Sonenshine told The Irrawaddy. "It is quite amazing to see these young people from Burma here in Washington at a Wizard's game," she said. "It is really a dramatic moment standing here with the future leaders of Burma."

The first ever basketball exchange program with support from the NBA is a follow up to the US Sports Envoy program, which brought several American managers and former players to Burma for the first time in August 2012.

Rich Cho, the Charlotte Bobcats' manager and Los Angeles Lakers' assistant coach Darvin Ham visited Burma at the time, together with former NBA player Marty Conlon and Allison Feaster, a former Women's National Basketball Association player.

"This is part of our effort to increase people-to-people contact," said Than Swe, Burma's Ambassador to the US. "It is very important to know each other. Sport is a unifying factor."

With the improvement in relationships between the US and Burma, the ambassador hoped that there will be more such exchanges, which would help build relationships between the two countries.

Kyaw Kyaw Win, general secretary of Myanmar Basketball federation, said the recent warming of US-Burma relations and President Obama's visit to Rangoon in November had paved the way for the sports exchange programs, adding that these initiatives would help raise sporting standards in Burma.

"We are here to basically learn the fundamentals of basketball in the country," Kyaw Kyaw Win, said. "At the same time we are also getting an opportunity to look at the educational system of the US," he added.