




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ORLANDO MAGIC NEWS SPORTS

# Magic players recall one of basketball's rites of passage, their first dunks

 By **STEPHEN RUIZ**  
ORLANDO SENTINEL | OCT 18, 2019

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Orlando Magic players rise to the challenge for bragging rights and opportunity to be crowned the winner of "What do you know about 1989?" [Twitter](#) [Facebook](#) [Share](#)

A year after Terrence Ross won the NBA slam-dunk contest during All-Star Weekend in 2013, he was in Denver for a game in early February.

Ross is now a valuable sixth man for the Orlando Magic, but then he was with the Toronto Raptors. Right before halftime, teammate Amir Johnson forced a turnover. The ball bounced toward Ross, who headed to the opposite end of the court.

Then-Nuggets forward Kenneth Faried stood between Ross and the rim.

Undeterred, Ross dunked the ball over Faried, showing on that night — and so many others since then — that he has come a long way from the first time he slammed a ball through the basket.

### Terrence Ross' MONSTER Dunk on Kenneth Faried



"I was in seventh grade," said Ross, 28. "I was always trying — lunch, practice, whatever. And then one practice, I finally just got it. I started dunking little volleyballs. I started working on women's basketballs and then men's-sized basketballs."

Even for NBA players, first dunks are rarely artistic, but they are masterpieces in their own way. They are unforgettable, each one a crowd-pleasing jolt of adrenaline with the potential to shift momentum before the ball hits the floor.

Most of the Magic's players said they dunked for the first time not long after they became teenagers. It became a rite of passage in their evolution as players.

"The first time I dunked the ball, it was off an alley oop, because I couldn't dunk it by myself," said Jonathan Isaac, Orlando's third-year forward. "It was my sophomore year in high school. The first time I had an in-game dunk was junior year. It was, I guess, a huge milestone."

Said center Mo Bamba, whose first dunk occurred when he was 13 years old: "I'd say it's like climbing a mountain, getting to the top of it."

At the imposing height of 10 feet, the rim can seem like Everest to a boy. It is forever out of reach until one day, it isn't.

Developing basketball players the world over dream of the day they can dunk. It doesn't matter whether those players came from Europe, such as center Nikola Vucevic and Evan Fournier; Canada, Khem Birch's native land; or points all across the United States.

Birch said his first dunk came during a fast break when he was in eighth grade in Ottawa. He referred to his first slam as "a fake dunk" because it didn't go directly through the hoop.

He counted it anyway.

"There were a bunch of 12th-graders in there, and they were all laughing at me," Birch said. "I was so excited, I didn't even care what anyone thought. I was just happy because everyone was just talking about me dunking in a game."

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## Zach Lavine vs Aaron Gordon - Dunk Contest 2016



In today's NBA, dunking is as commonplace as fans attempting midcourt shots. The league has so many players at the peak of their high-flying ways, including the Magic's Aaron Gordon, Russell Westbrook of the Houston Rockets, Blake Griffin of the Detroit Pistons and Dennis Mitchell of the Utah Jazz.

At 34 years old, LeBron James of the Los Angeles Lakers still attacks the rim with ferocity. And lest we forget, Daytona Beach native Vince Carter — embarking on his 22nd and final NBA season with the Atlanta Hawks — is one of the sport's all-time great dunkers.

They all started somewhere, out of the spotlight, with a ball in their hands, their sights on the rim and hoping their legs will take them to heights their bodies never had gone before.

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For Gordon, that moment came in middle school. He was 12 years old.

"I used to miss two or three dunks a game before I could actually dunk, so I was trying and trying and trying and trying," said Gordon, who placed second to former Minnesota Timberwolves high flyer Zach LaVine at the 2016 NBA All-Star dunk contest. "I had to stretch, so I really didn't see it go in, but then I saw the crowd going crazy. I was like, 'Oh, man, I just dunked it.'

"It's just a level of dominance. It's a level of assertion, basically the embodiment of, 'You can't stop me from putting this ball in this basket.'"

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