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Why Does a Bucks Security Guard Look Familiar? He Used to Play for the Team

By **Scott Cacciola**

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MILWAUKEE — Dick Garrett is not the type of person who draws attention to himself. Co-workers at Bucks games have gone entire seasons without realizing his special connection to the team. Even some of the regulars who sit in the section of the arena where he works security are oblivious.

So when Peter Feigin became the team president in 2014, he only got to know Garrett in his role as one of the franchise's more beloved employees, largely because Garrett never talked much about himself. But a few months into Feigin's tenure, the Bucks organized a dinner for former players, and Garrett showed up.

"Dick," Feigin recalled asking him, "what are you doing here?"

At the time, Feigin was embarrassed. Perhaps he should have known that Garrett played for the Bucks the last time they went to the N.B.A. finals, in 1974. Or that he was once named to the N.B.A.'s All-Rookie team with the Los Angeles Lakers. Or that he had an eventful five-year career.

But Feigin said he also came to realize that it was entirely in character for Garrett to keep his story quiet. Whenever people ask him about his days in the N.B.A., Garrett usually says something like, "Oh, I used to play some ball." He is more likely to talk about his family, or his golf game, or the 28 years he spent selling beer for Miller.

Garrett, 72, still loves basketball, though, which is why he has kept his part-time gig at home games here — 18 years and counting.

"I get the same feeling every time I walk into the gym," he said, "until my old body says, 'Oh, wait a minute.'"



Dick Garrett played college basketball at Southern Illinois. The Los Angeles Lakers selected him in the second round of the 1969 draft. Associated Press

His job is really a blend — part crowd control, part ambassador, part usher, part fan. It has been an exceptional season for the Bucks, who are set to host the Toronto Raptors on Friday night in Game 2 of the Eastern Conference finals. Garrett will be there, too, parked in a folding chair in front of section 108, where he will monitor fan behavior, help people find their seats, greet old friends, pose for a picture or two (he does get recognized on occasion) and cheer for the Bucks, who have a 1-0 series lead after winning Wednesday’s opener, 108-100.

He always cheers for the Bucks.

“Well, we’re not supposed to,” he said. “But there’s no way I’m just going to sit there.”

The job gets him out of the house and keeps him connected to the game. He has seen plenty of basketball over the years — some good, some bad. But he has been especially grateful for his front-row seat for the evolution of Giannis Antetokounmpo. Garrett sensed from Antetokounmpo's early days that he would be a remarkable player; he always arrived hours before games to work on his skills.

“And working *hard*,” Garrett said.

Garrett, who has a salt-and-pepper mustache and an easy smile, could have been speaking from experience. He and his wife, Penny, were married his senior year at Southern Illinois, and she was pregnant with their first child when the Lakers selected Garrett in the second round of the 1969 draft. A friend knocked on the door of their mobile home near campus to deliver the news.

“Dick was a solid player,” Wayne Embry, the longtime N.B.A. executive, said in a telephone interview. “Nothing flashy. Terrific defender. And he saw the whole court.”

A 6-foot-3 combo guard, Garrett crammed a lot of action (and some notable supporting roles) into his N.B.A. career. As a rookie in 1969-70, he averaged 11.6 points a game and started for the Lakers alongside the likes of Wilt Chamberlain, Jerry West and Elgin Baylor. The Lakers faced the Knicks in the N.B.A. finals, and Garrett often matched up against Walt Frazier, his former college teammate. Garrett played him tough through the first six games.



Garrett doesn't like talking about himself very much, but interacting with fans at the Bucks' arena? That's one of his favorite parts of the job. Lauren Justice for The New York Times

Then came Game 7 at Madison Square Garden, where the Knicks' injured Willis Reed famously emerged from a courtside tunnel with his right thigh bandaged up. Garrett picked up three early fouls, and Frazier finished with 36 points and 19 assists as the Knicks won their first championship.

"He just kind of went a little wild on me," Garrett said.

Garrett spent the next three seasons with the Buffalo Braves, a cellar-dwelling expansion franchise, before joining the Knicks for the start of the 1973-74 season. The Knicks had signed Garrett to help fill in while Earl Monroe was injured, then released him when Monroe returned. Garrett eventually landed with the Bucks, who advanced to the finals behind Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Oscar Robertson.

The series, though, left Garrett with mixed feelings. He played sparingly as the Bucks lost to the Boston Celtics in seven games. And after a couple of deals fell through for the following season, he took a job in insurance. He had a young family, and playing in the N.B.A. was not yet particularly lucrative.

Still, he had to cope with the fact that his pro career was finished — almost overnight.

“For a couple of years, I was kind of bitter about it,” he said. “But then I realized, life is too short to be angry and bitter all the time. I told myself, ‘Suck it up, Dick. Go to work, son. Be happy. Life goes on.’ And I know I was fortunate, because I’ve got a lot of friends who never made it as far as I did.”

Garrett fed his competitive drive by obliterating opponents in recreational leagues around Milwaukee. He recalled one winter when he played for a team that won about 59 games out of 60. He also made cameos at Bucks practices. Don Nelson, then the team’s coach, summoned Garrett whenever he needed an extra body, and Garrett always felt as if he held his own. Looking back, he said, he should have been more vocal about angling for a comeback.

“I should have told Nellie, ‘I’m available!’ ” Garrett said. “But you just don’t know. Plus, I was doing O.K. I was working, and I was happy with my kids.”



As the Bucks surged to the top of the Eastern Conference behind the superstar Giannis Antetokounmpo, Garrett had a front-row seat. Though it’s not always easy to spot him. Lauren Justice for The New York Times

By then, Garrett was raising four children with his wife and working as an account representative for Miller. He loved dealing with people — still does — and that was a big part of the job. Besides, he says, if you can't sell Miller products in Milwaukee, where the company was founded, you might as well find a different line of work.

Garrett was doing well in sales when one of his bowling buddies asked if he would be interested in moonlighting at Bucks games. Garrett put it off for a couple of years before he reached out.

“I said, ‘O.K., I’m ready,’ ” Garrett said.

In the nearly two decades since, he has rarely missed a home game. Malcolm Morgan, the event security supervisor for Fiserv Forum, said the job belongs to Garrett for as long as he wants it.

“You better believe it,” Morgan said. “The guy is a blessing.”

Garrett did get a couple of nights off a few years ago so he could sit in the stands and watch his son Diante play for the Utah Jazz and the Phoenix Suns when they rolled through town. “That was a real thrill,” Garrett said. (Diante now plays pro basketball in Turkey.)

Garrett and his wife celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary last September, but they also suffered a loss over the winter when their daughter Jermia died from a severe asthma attack. It has been a difficult time for the family. Coming to the arena, Garrett said, has helped in some small way.

“I needed something to keep me busy,” he said, “and basketball was there for me.”

So Garrett keeps showing up in his team-issue blazer, relishing his modest role, same as ever. Sometimes, he said, a fan will recognize him from the old days and ask him a question: *You played ball, Dick! Why are you down there doing that?*

“And they must think this is somehow beneath me,” he said. “But I’ve also got 100 people coming up to me: ‘How do I get that job?’ Listen, I’m at an N.B.A. game, on the floor, watching the best players in the world. And getting paid for it!”