Charity Stripe

Alumna Promotes Good Work of NBA/WNBA Players Off Court

by Beth Rosenberg '91

When Kathy Behrens '85, made her debut during the final episode of NBC's hit show, The Apprentice, last season, she was in no danger of hearing the dreaded words "You're fired!"—made famous by New York real estate mogul and reality television star Donald Trump.

If, somehow, you've escaped the considerable hype that surrounds the show and its star, it involves a group of ambitious contenders who are given a series of challenging assignments. Week by week, "The Donald" reviews their efforts, and those who don't measure up he dismisses with gusto. In the end, only one survives to collect the prize of a job with an annual salary of $250,000.

Behrens, senior vice president for community relations at the National Basketball Association (NBA), was contacted by the show to help set up a final assignment for one of the two remaining contenders. Jennifer M. was handed the job of coordinating the Genworth Charity Basketball Classic to benefit the NBA's Read to Achieve program, one of several community outreach efforts Behrens oversees. Her opponent, Kelly, organized the Genworth/Trump Polo Cup to raise money for the Alzheimer's Association.

"I got my 30 seconds of Apprentice fame," says Behrens, 41. "That was the money shot for me on the show—a big handshake with me, Donald, and former Detroit Pistons star Bob Lanier."

"It was amusing," she says of her role on the show. "It gave us a chance to promote our literacy program, and we raised some money for it." The Read to Achieve program has created more than 90 Reading and Learning Centers worldwide that provide reading materials and technology to more than 50 million children each year.

Behrens, a 1985 graduate of the College of Education, Nursing and Health Professions, has been with the NBA since 2000 and was promoted to her current position last October. She oversees the global philanthropic efforts of the NBA and the Women's National Basketball Association. These include literacy and education programs, the support of youth basketball leagues, and programs to develop the game around the world.

"It's an extraordinary opportunity to be on the front lines and see our players really make a difference. To be able to help facilitate that is very gratifying," Behrens says of her position. "My favorite part of the job is seeing the impact that our players and the game itself can have all over the world."

For example, the Basketball without Borders program she oversees takes NBA players to Africa, China, South America, and Europe to teach kids about the game. At the same time, the players interact with these communities to promote issues like education and HIV/AIDS awareness.

But, like Donald Trump, NBA players know their celebrity status sometimes gets them manhandled by the media. Behrens finds this part of her job frustrating.

She cites the mid-November altercation between the Detroit Pistons and the Indiana Pacers as an excellent example of media bias. Although both players and fans were involved, sports commentators and writers tended to focus on player behavior.

"There's no question that people pay more attention to the mistakes that some of our players make than to the overwhelmingly positive things that they're involved in," Behrens says. "For every negative story or every negative incident that happens, I can give you 20 stories of players who have done really good things."