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## The Drill: Q&A with Roney Eford

*Posted: Dec. 19, 2007*

The former Marquette Golden Eagles star guard is back in Milwaukee and still involved in basketball. After an eight-year career overseas, Eford, 34, runs a skills academy and also has begun a non-profit youth mentoring organization, Pinnacles For Youth, that seeks to engage youngsters through basketball and other sports. Eford recently spoke with MU beat writer Todd Rosiak.

### **Q. Has your status as a former player helped in reaching the kids?**

**A.** Absolutely. I volunteered at a number of non-profit organizations in the past that had some of the same programs, but the mission was a little different. It's much easier and you have more validity with kids when kids hear I played professionally. They're much more engaged.

### **Q. What's the goal of Pinnacles For Youth?**

**A.** Some of these kids' family situations are unfortunately extremely negative, and we're hopeful that we can turn some of these kids' lives around through the use of sports and push them through school so that they can go to college and become a productive citizen. Not just that they can automatically think the NHL, the NFL, the NBA or major-league baseball. There's other avenues. When we have people come in and speak, basically they're speaking through their life experiences.

### **Q. You played for quite some time professionally overseas. Was it hard to finally give it up?**

**A.** I was fortunate enough to have an opportunity to play professional basketball after college, and was able to earn a living while doing it . . . but there comes a time that you understand you can't do it for the rest of your life. There came a time when I said I wanted to do other things.

## **Q. What are your impressions of MU this season?**

**A.** I think Coach (Tom) Crean has done a phenomenal job of building up the program back into a first-class program. He's recruited great people, first and foremost, but also great athletes. I wish I could've had a chance to play for him.

*You can find more information on Eford's ventures at [www.pinnaclesforyouth.com](http://www.pinnaclesforyouth.com) and [www.roneyfordbasketball.com](http://www.roneyfordbasketball.com).*

## **Catching up with Roney Eford**

**By Todd Rosiak : Milwaukee Journal Sentinel**

**Wednesday, Dec 19 2007, 01:09 PM**

Consistency and versatility.

Perhaps no two words better described what Roney Eford brought to the Marquette Golden Eagles on a daily basis from 1992 through 1996. The native New Yorker made himself known as soon as he arrived on campus, averaging 11.0 points per game as a freshman, and continued to hold a key role for MU in his sophomore, junior and senior years as well.

In four seasons he played in three NCAA tournaments, including the Golden Eagles' memorable run to the Sweet 16 in 1994, and was also a member of MU's runner-up National Invitation Tournament team in 1995. He averaged a personal-best 13.2 points per game as a junior, was a senior captain for the 1995-'96 season and remains in the MU record books as the school's 13th all-time leading scorer with 1,471 points.

Eford also ranks seventh in field-goal attempts with 1,252, three-point field goal percentage at 38.5% and is the 10th all-time leader in three-pointers made with 150.

Eford, 34, recently returned to Milwaukee, where he has started a non-profit youth mentoring organization, Pinnacles For Youth. He also continues to be involved with basketball, including running his own skills academy.

I recently had a chance to speak with Eford about his life since graduating from MU. Here's what he had to say:

**What have you been doing since you played at MU?** "After leaving Marquette I played for about 7 ½-8 years internationally. Was playing with the Bucks in the L.A. Summer League. Went to a lot of free-agent camps in the NBA outside of the Bucks. Never on a veterans' team or on a roster, but after that I played basically all over the world - Japan, China, Korea, mostly in those three countries. I played in Germany in the First Division - actually played against Dirk Nowitzki. Besides that I played a little bit in the states in the minor leagues; in the CBA for a little bit. Then after that, basically toward the end of my career, I'd do a lot of clinics and player coaching. It kind of got me on that path. When I was still playing I founded my own minor-league team. It was a little too much to handle just by myself so I sold that and moved on.

"Basically I've been in the minor-league world for awhile. People have asked me to come in, and I was the general manager for a couple of minor-league teams. It was a great experience because it gives you a lot of

hands-on learning in terms of with the coaching, the front-office experience. The only negative thing is you don't know when the operations are going to cease. You have no control over it. That was the frustrating part - building it up and all of a sudden someone comes in and says, 'We're going to finish after this game.' That's a shock.

"I was in grad school during that time, so then I decided to focus my energies and started an educational, non-profit organization where we actually assist with homework, tutoring, field trips. We have mentors come in. Right now all my energies are focused on that. We're pending getting our 501C application, which we should get in a couple months. Really focused on that and having the community support it and sponsor us, to really help some of the economically disadvantaged youths. Basically the mission of the program is really to assist youths to realize their potential utilizing basketball as a means to engage the participants, to get them to realize the importance of education so they can be successful in college and then also move on in life."

**Has your status as a former player helped in reaching the kids?** "Absolutely. I volunteered at a number of non-profit organizations in the past that had some of the same programs but the mission was a little different. It's much easier and you have more validity with kids when kids hear I played professionally. They're much more engaged. Prior to doing this I also had my own basketball academy, which I still run as well. I've been doing that since 2003 here and also back on the East Coast. That's more with skill development. We do camps and clinics and that sort of thing. To get back your question, you definitely have the kids' attention. I still play. I'm not great, but I'm able to - whether it's grade-school or high-school kids - I'm still able to get out there and show them drills and that type of thing. It is beneficial. Some of these kids' family situations are unfortunately extremely negative, and we're hopeful that we can turn some of these kids' lives around through the use of sports and push them through school so that they can go to college and become a productive citizen.

"Not just that they can automatically think the NHL, the NFL, the NBA or major-league baseball. There's other avenues. When we have people come in and speak basically they're speaking through their life experiences. However, we don't have just the local athlete come in and speak; we have someone that's a lawyer who may be on our board of directors. We have someone like myself who maybe played basketball for maybe a few years but still have your whole life to live afterwards. We tend to cater towards that. Even in my basketball academy, I tend to cater towards athletes who are doing much more than just playing every day because the reality is not everyone is going to be able to make that NBA team. A lot of these kids, we're their only role models and they need to see someone that's doing much more than just playing a particular sport."

**Are you based in Milwaukee now, full-time?** "Yes I am, as of about three months ago. I've always been going back and forth. I do go back east a little bit to visit family and I may scout a game, but now Milwaukee is my home. I like it here. It's not something that's new to me because I've been going back and forth for eight years."

**Was it hard to hang up the sneakers as a competitive player?** "I've been fortunate enough to have great experiences. I've traveled to over 23 different countries. I'm conversational in three different languages. I love Europe, I love Asia. I want to live there one day. I was fortunate enough to have an opportunity to play professional basketball after college, and was able to earn a living while doing it. It's something I'm very grateful for. I tried to maximize the talent I had to the fullest. But there comes a time that you understand you can't do it for the rest of your life. I still have friends who are playing - friends that are older than me who are still playing - but like everything else you have to have that desire in order to continue. You can't say, 'OK, I'm playing just for the contract and the lifestyle.' You really have to be true to yourself because you have to be willing to put in the time. When you come to that consensus that you're not willing to put in that extra time as your skills are waning as you get older, it's going to be much harder to train because you cannot afford to be out of shape.

"There came a time when I said I wanted to do other things. People call me and email me from time to time to play, but for me I feel that I can impact more lives than just going over and playing basketball. I believe I

have a calling to help out youths. It's just coming to that realization that you enjoyed it, you maximized it the most and now it's time to move on to Phase 2 of your life with no regrets. But I am still active. I work out three times a week, and when I'm training kids I'm obviously working out basketball-wise as well. It's still in the blood, but you have to put it down sometime."

**As a former MU player, what are your impressions of this year's team?** "I'm a diehard MU fan. I didn't realize the camaraderie that one has with their university when I was in school. I think Coach Crean has done a phenomenal job of building up the program back into a first-class program. He does things the right way. I had the opportunity to watch him and his intensity and study his ways, and he's done a phenomenal job. He's recruited great people, first and foremost, but also great athletes. They have a good recruiting class coming in, and I think the sky's the limit for them. As well as 'The Big Three' plays is going to be as well as the team goes. So if those three can jell, which they have been doing, I think they'll do fine. I've seen a couple other Big East teams, and I think (MU) ranks up there. The players are always well-prepared. Marquette is lucky to have a coach like Tom Crean. I wish I could've had a chance to play for him. I enjoyed my experience at Marquette, but I think it could've been enhanced if I could have played for him."

*Eford's web sites:*

[www.pinnaclesforyouth.org](http://www.pinnaclesforyouth.org)

[www.roneyefordbasketball.com](http://www.roneyefordbasketball.com)