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PHOTO. Dorothy Hong

# NBA English Lessons

*During the 2010 NBA Playoffs, I heard the Phoenix Suns were watching an Eastern Conference game at a bar in Portland about a mile from the English, baby! office. I rounded up a cameraperson and headed over.*

Sure enough, there was Amar'e Stoudemire, Jason Richardson, Jared Dudley and a small entourage. I approached Amar'e first. "Would you be interested in doing a very quick interview that helps people in China learn English?"

"I'm good," he said. But Jared Dudley overheard. "How much traffic do you have in China?" I told him about a third of our million-plus members are Chinese. He was onboard.

With as many NBA fans in China as there are in the U.S., players are looking for ways to interact with international audiences. Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are all banned in China, so aside from a handful of guys with foreign shoe endorsements and an occasional preseason game overseas, opportunities can be hard to come by. It's especially hard to make a personal connection with fans who have limited English skills.

"Students in other countries want to speak the same English we do in the U.S.," explains English, baby! CEO John Hayden. "The ability to learn basketball slang directly from an NBA star is something very unique for them."

So I went on a mission to turn as many ballers into teachers as I could, helping the largest English education community on the Internet improve their court lingo and knowledge of the game. Fortunately, I didn't have to stalk them all like Dudley – most of the two-dozen players we've enlisted over the last two years agreed in advance – and all of them showed a side of themselves American fans don't often see. Here are some of the best quotes:

**CARMELO ANTHONY** may be mellow, but he ain't sweet: "I know in China my name means 'sweet melon,' but I don't like that name."

**NICOLAS BATUM's** rather brutal definition of slam dunk: "You just go to the rim, and crush. Crush the ball in the rim. That's all. Yeah."

**JARED DUDLEY** using his favorite three-point slang in a sentence: "Right about now, I'ma drop some three balls on this team. There you go."

**ZYDRUNAS ILGAUSKAS** may get lots of second-chance points, but he's not too keen on second chances: "Second chance? I don't know! Depending how forgiving your wife is! Not everybody gets a second

chance, so I guess my advice would be don't get to that point."

**ZAZA PACHULIA** on swag: "It's spelled s-w-a-g and it's a very popular word, especially in Atlanta. It's people who have their own style. Basically it's something that's noticeable about you."

**SHANE BATTIER** has picked up a thing or two on his annual visits to China to promote his PEAK sneakers: "I speak Chinese with Yao sometimes, especially after my trips, but he looks at me like I'm crazy."



**SASHA VUJACIC** on how to be a machine: "You can be a machine if you don't sleep at all. You can be a machine if you don't feel pain or whatever. Whenever you see a little bit of supernatural power in someone, you can call them a machine."

**YI JIANLIAN** is pretty clear on what it means to put the ball on the floor: "Dribbling. Attack the basket."

**MARC GASOL** on the difference between playing in the post and posting on his blog: "It has a different meaning. You just write a story or something you want to tell the readers. You post your thoughts or your writings or anything."

**J.J. BAREA** on if his Puerto Rican dance moves are also good moves on the court: "I could do some things but I'm not a big fan. But if I have to, I'll get it done."

**CHANNING FRYE** on breakthroughs: "You continually push on a piece of glass, you know? You just keep pushing and pushing and pushing and right when you think nothing is gonna happen, you get one crack and that crack inspires you to continue going and pushing."

**RICHARD HAMILTON** on running clinics in China: "A lot of people don't know that there's a lot of taller players over there. You get over there and you see kids 14 years old and 6-8, 6-9, and you would never think that."

**AL HORFORD's** strategy for learning a language: "It's all about repetition and really listening to people and trying to catch everything."

*To see these complete English lessons, as well as interviews with Danny Granger, Juwan Howard, Marcin Gortat, Rodrigue Beaubois and more, visit [www.englishbaby.com/nba](http://www.englishbaby.com/nba).*