

A Native Son on the Hardwood Court:

Derrick V. Collins Reflects on a Long NBA Officiating Career

By Chris Fontenot



Derrick V. Collins is a veteran National Basketball Association official who is widely respected for his composure, leadership and



Anthony Edwards dunks, while Derrick looks on in the background

longevity in one of the most demanding roles in professional sports. For two decades, the New Orleans native has been a steady presence in packed arenas where emotions run high, superstars shine bright, and every whistle is replayed from a dozen angles.

When the whistle cuts through the roar of 20,000 fans, sharp and absolute, the game pauses. Players pivot. Coaches fall quiet. The moment belongs to the man in gray.

That calm authority has made Derrick one of the league's most trusted officials, consistently assigned to critical regular-season matchups, playoff battles, and NBA Finals contests. But before he speaks about basketball, he speaks about home.

"Before this article barrels into the hype and traveling, etc., I really want to express my indebtedness for life's professional progression to my family — in particular, my beautiful wife, Julie, and my children, Chloe Angelie, Tyler Christopher and Kylie Angel. I endure because of them, and success is determined by completing my role as a husband and father. I truly cherish our relationship more than anything else."

His faith anchors him just as firmly. He often recalls a sermon he heard at Beacon Light Church in New Orleans by Avory Johnson: "If Nothing Changes Nothing Changes."

"One of the most lasting pieces of advice Avory gave me regarding Julie was, 'What are you waiting on, man. Marry that girl.' I took his advice, and I have been married to Julie ever since."

Another directive shaped his spiritual walk.

"Man, you've got to get in that Word."

"To this day," Derrick says, "I have been working on a better

PHOTOS COURTESY OF DERRICK COLLINS

relationship with Christ by getting in The Word of God.”

For Derrick, leadership on the hardwood court flows from submission at home — to faith, to covenant, to calling.

Early Life and Path to Officiating

Born August 16, 1965 in Louisiana and raised Uptown on Carondelet Street, Derrick grew up in a family where athletics were part of the culture. His grandfather played baseball. His uncle, Bobby Bissant, played college basketball. His father, Alvin Collins, competed in both baseball and basketball. Competitive fire and discipline ran deep in the Collins family.

Basketball entered Derrick’s life early. At five years old, he followed his Uncle Bobby to games at Loyola University New Orleans, racing onto the court afterward to shoot with older kids. By the age of ten, he was immersed in Biddy Basketball at the Lyon Center and Keller Park — headband, wristbands, knee pads, and all.

“When you come across half court, let it fly,” he remembers being told.

At Brother Martin High School, he sharpened his edge in the competitive Catholic League, serving as a composed floor general. Even as a teenager, he rarely got rattled in loud gyms or tense moments.

He continued his playing career at Xavier University of Louisiana, competing at a high level and receiving guidance from influential mentors. But a fractured leg during his senior year altered his path.

“I knew I wasn’t 100 percent,” Derrick admits. “And at that level, 90 percent isn’t enough.”

A move to Los Angeles in pursuit of professional playing opportunities revealed a hard truth: the NBA dream as a player

was slipping away. That’s when his Uncle Bobby offered simple counsel: pick up a whistle.

“I told him, ‘Put that whistle in your mouth and get going until you find something else,’” his Uncle Bobby recalls.

Officiating began humbly in recreation leagues across Southern California. The pay was modest. The criticism wasn’t.

“You develop thick skin,” Derrick says. “You learn to stay professional no matter what.”

He climbed deliberately — college conferences, developmental leagues and professional assignments. At one point, he stepped away from a desk job at the IRS, returned to New Orleans, cut grass with his father, and recommitted to the craft. The WNBA and G League became proving grounds. Mentors refined his mechanics and decision-making.

Then came the call to the NBA.

NBA Career

Derrick joined the NBA staff in the early 2000s and has since built a résumé defined by endurance and excellence. Over the years, he has officiated more than 1,300 regular-season NBA games, as well as numerous NBA Playoff matchups and assignments in the NBA Finals.

Finals assignments are a distinction reserved for officials who demonstrate sustained accuracy, professionalism and command of the game throughout the season.



Family: Far left-Chloe Angelia Collins, 2nd left - Derrick, Middle-Julie(wife), 2nd Right-Tyler Christopher Collins, Far Right-Kylie Angel Collins -7th Grade

One unforgettable moment came on March 18, 2023, when the Minnesota Timberwolves faced the Utah Jazz. Rising above the noise was Minnesota’s 4-time All-Star shooting guard Anthony Edwards, who delivered a thunderous dunk over the head of Utah’s John Collins — a play instantly labeled a “Dunk of the Year” candidate.

The arena erupted, but Derrick, who was officiating, did not.

“That’s a great play,” he later said. “But I still got a job to do. I’m looking at legality — not the highlight.”

While the crowd replayed the spectacle, Derrick was already focused on positioning for the inbound. “We’re graded on every call,” he explained. “There are no makeup calls. You strive for perfection and try not to repeat mistakes.”

Officiating Style and Reputation

As a referee with 24 seasons under his belt, Derrick is widely known for his calm demeanor under pressure, strong communication with players and coaches, consistent rule enforcement and clear court presence and positioning.

In high-intensity playoff environments, referees must manage superstar athletes, animated coaching staff and roaring crowds. Derrick approaches each contest like an athlete himself — maintaining conditioning, studying film, and preparing mentally for split-second decisions.

Superstars do not intimidate him. “They’re just players,” he says. “The focus



Derrick & Dwayne Wade of Miami Heat



PHOTOS COURTESY OF DERRICK COLLINS



Derrick receiving Hall of Fame honors at Xavier University Of New Orleans



Derrick with mom, Julia Collins



Derrick with Normani Hamilton

physical endurance, adaptability to rule changes, and mental resilience.

Derrick’s uncle Bobby Bissant attributes his longevity to “endurance and discipline.” His cousin, recording artist Normani Hamilton, adds, “My cousin Derrick’s resilience and sacrifices on and off the court do not go unnoticed—he’ll always be one of my favorite blueprints.”

Legacy

Summing up his lengthy, eventful career, Derrick said, “You never lose interest. Every game is a new adventure in this NBA experience.

is getting the play right.”

His playing background gives him an instinct for sport. “As a player, it’s natural,” he continued. “You develop a feel for the game. That helps you combine instinct with the laws of the game.”

Derrick also appreciates brilliance — “like watching Stephen Curry glide off a screen and rise for three. It’s like ballet. Beautiful to watch, but you still have a job to do.”

He also addresses common misconceptions. “This is not wrestling,” he emphasized. “It’s real. We’re graded on every play. No team gets favoritism. We just want to get it right.”

Leadership Role

Beyond making calls, Derrick has served as a crew chief, overseeing officiating teams and taking responsibility for key replay decisions. The role demands poise, collaboration and decisive leadership.

Veteran officials like Derrick also mentor younger referees entering the league, helping them adjust to its speed and scrutiny. His philosophy is simple: “Firm, fair, and approachable. Every game is teaching and preaching.”

Despite being nearly a quarter of a century into his NBA officiating career, Derrick has not seriously considered retirement. Longevity at this level requires

After 20-plus years officiating some of the greatest players in the game, every night brings new possibilities and excitement.”

While referees rarely receive headlines, their presence safeguards the integrity and flow of the game. Derrick represents a steady hand — a New Orleans son carrying the city’s resilience and rhythm into arenas across the country.

In a league defined by highlight dunks and buzzer-beaters, Derrick Collins reminds us that greatness is not always measured in points scored. Sometimes it is measured in years served, composure maintained and a whistle that still commands respect.



Derrick with Uncle Bobby Bissant

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