

The Virgin Islands Consortium

VI NBA Star Rakeem Christmas Already Giving Back

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ST. CROIX -- He walked quietly into the Frederiksted Boys & Girls Club building on Thursday morning, flanked by his aunt, Amira Hamid-Joseph, who doubles as his manager, along with a few family members. But Rakeem Christmas, the newly minted NBA ball player, who finally settled with the Indiana Pacers after moving from Timberwolves and the Cavaliers, was on a mission to give back to his community; even if he hasn't played a single game in the NBA.

The star told *VI Consortium* that he wanted to encourage the teens to "go out there, work hard and be a good person, stay good in school and everything will fall in place. It's the course that I took in my life and it's been going good for me, and that's why I'm in this position that I'm in right now," he said.

The young star was fresh off the Boys & Girls Club's basketball court, where he shot hoops with the teens, signed autographs and took pictures. Earlier, he spoke with them about education, staying healthy, and what it takes to achieve the kind of success he has.

"I completed college in three years," he said while encouraging the teens to go the extra mile.

According to Christmas, now that he's out of school and in the NBA, during off-season, he will be visiting the territory more often. Originally from New Jersey, he moved to St. Croix at the age of two with his mother, Landra Hamid-Joseph. His mother died at age of 28 due to kidney failure, and young Christmas was raised by his grandmother before moving to Philadelphia.

The Virgin Islander's successful draft to the NBA is the first for the territory since Tim Duncan. But that's just half the story.

Christmas would visit his aunt every summer and a strong bond grew between the two. And when his mother passed, the bond grew even stronger. "He's like our last connection to her," Hamid-Joseph said. She revealed that Christmas first started playing baseball while here, and didn't get involved in basketball until 8th grade.

It was always Christmas' desire, following the death of his mother, to live with his aunt. However, while in college, it was difficult for Hamid-Joseph to accommodate him. Wanting not to break his heart, she promised her nephew that upon completing school, he would move in. Christmas could not wait, and after visiting his aunt for the graduation ceremony at Philadelphia's Drexel University, he said, "I'm not going back."

"Some people say he came up to the states to play basketball, [but] Rakeem didn't start until 8th grade. But God's amazing, and this is what I truly believe he was placed here to do," she said.

Hamid-Joseph is the only one of four children who was born on St. Croix. Her entire family hails from Dominica, WI, where she would visit every summer. The highly accomplished Crucian, who last year won [Mrs. Pennsylvania](#), attended Claude O. Markoe Elementary; Arthur Richards Junior High; graduated from the St. Croix Educational Complex and earned a chemical engineering degree at Drexel.

And in relation to giving back, Christmas' foundation is currently being created, Hamid-Joseph confirmed, and will encompass all the places he has ties to, including the territory, Syracuse, Philadelphia and Indiana.

As it relates to home, Christmas is "very well vested in the VI," Hamid-Joseph said, revealing that has a tattoo of the Virgin islands and the numbers '340' (the islands' area code) tattooed on his body.

"He loves the culture. He considers this his home and no place else," she said.

Indeed, one of the first things Christmas did when he arrived on Wednesday night was fishing on the Frederiksted dock.

