

"Inflate 7-9 lbs./Notes on Becoming a Star" on display in Mandeville

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It's 1978 and the Seattle SuperSonics are playing the Washington Bullets in the National Basketball Association play-offs. The star of the game: Brad Stensberg, No. 22, a 5-foot-9-inch forward who has scored 29 points for the Sonics and who has won the adoration of the cheering crowd.

Who is Brad Stensberg and why is his name unfamiliar to millions of sports fans who followed the climb of the Sonics last year and who rooted for the team in the finals?

Stensberg is a 29-year-old Master of Fine Arts candidate at the University of California., San Diego who drew upon a childhood fantasy for his final MFA project.

With the cooperation of the NBA and the SuperSonics, Stensberg developed a 20-minute video show which seems to document Stensberg's rise from anonymity to super-stardom as a member of the Seattle team. He spent three days with the Sonics, filming them and inserting himself into their action so that he could be filmed as part of the team.

The result, "Inflate 7-9 lbs./Notes on Becoming a Star," is on display through June 17 at the UC San Diego Mandeville Art Gallery. Gallery hours are noon to 5 p.m. Sunday through Friday and 7-10 p.m. Wednesday.

Visitors to the exhibit will see four videotapes being played simultaneously. Stensberg, perspiring and in uniform, is shown being interviewed with "teammates" Paul Silas and John Johnson. Films of Stensberg's fancy dribbling, his powerful slam-dunk shots (accomplished with the aid of a specially-built ramp) and an endless series of successful free-throws are flashed on the gallery walls, and the sound of a wildly-cheering crowd and an excited announcer are played in the background.

Stensberg even has T-shirts for sale, printed with his picture and the slogan "Brad Stensberg: The Nowhere Man, Coming Out of Nowhere."

"It was a dream I had a long time ago," Stensberg explained. "I was doing autobiographical works on videotape and it seemed natural to include that fantasy.

"The show isn't simply about basketball. It ties into the process and drive to become a success," he added. "I chose the SuperSonics because last year they were the Cinderella team, coming from nowhere and almost winning it all."

Now that the project is completed and on exhibit, Stensberg says it is strange to see himself on the television screen as a basketball star.

"While making the films, I recaptured old skills and old dreams," he said. "I got into shape again and I've started taking the play-offs seriously. And I feel bad if I miss one of my basketball classes."

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