

Reflect on Brandon Roy's Retirement by Celebrating The Best Sneaker Campaigns That Ended Too Soon

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Before his knees called it quits, Brandon Roy was well on his way to becoming a Nike icon for the brand's hometown state of Oregon. We look back on other sneaker campaigns that hung it up too soon.

The career of Brandon Roy has suddenly come to a halt, ending almost as quickly as it began.

The three-time All-Star, former Rookie of the Year, and homegrown hero to many a Northwesterner called it quits recently after learning his knees just can't take the pressure and impact anymore that the game of basketball demands.

Although he technically never had his own signature sleds, Roy (pictured above with the Nike Zoom BB II All-Star PE) was the closest thing the Nike state had to a sneaker icon since Rasheed Wallace used to scowl at refs anonymous in his patent leather Air Force 1's (with the 'Sheed logo in all its menacing glory stamped on the side of the heel).

Roy's lineup of dope PEs and Trainers always came emblazoned with his No. 7 on the back, and his burgeoning stardom seemed to cement his status as one of the future leading Nike ambassadors. Now his Swooshes, from the Nike Air Max Fly By to the Zoom Phenom to the Hyperfuse will forever be hung up, while Portlandia will be missing their finest on-court sneaker presence as well as the best player to don the black, white, and red in a long, long time.

It's not fun to see dudes like Roy hobbled by evil injuries, nor is it fun for sneaker gurus to get robbed of the prospect of holding in their hands another fly signature shoe from their favorite athlete. With the retirement of Brandon Roy, we'd like to say happy trails to a class act and reflect upon other athletes who had the freshest sneaker campaigns take a hit either through related injuries or otherwise.

Click below to kickstart the show ...



Gilbert Arenas, adidas Gil Zero I & II

Getting ousted by adidas through a combination of his buckled knees and his offcourt “issues” probably devastated Gilbert Arenas (shown above with the Benihana “Hibachi” x adidas Gil Zero II) but eventually became a towering visual boon to thirsty sneakerheads. Agent Zero was once one of the bigger names for the Three Stripes’ “Brotherhood” sneaker movement (which also featured the likes of Kevin Garnett, Timmy Duncan, and Dwight Howard) in between his Gil Zero I (featuring the dope as hell UNDRCRWN version) and II signature rides. Tragically, after adidas terminated Gil when he almost Dirty Harry’d Javaris Crittenton, he has been absolutely forced against his own will to spend his days as a lowly sneaker free agent, strained to choose what to wear nightly amongst his estate’s collection of Jordan’s, Penny’s, retro Nike’s, and whatever the hell else he wants. Poor Gilbert.



Magic Johnson, Converse

The sneaker highlight of Earvin's career are the Converse Weapons as he was one of the frontmen for their crazy nice lineup of 1980s players which also included Bernard King, Larry Bird, and Isiah Thomas. Magic's retirement due to HIV in 1991 eschewed in the new era of Converse heroes, but Magic, the Chevron sneaker icon will live on forever (Who wouldn't flip to find a pair of Converse Triple Doubles or Star Tech's at the local Goodwill?). Also, so will his rap skills.



Tracy McGrady, adidas T-Mac Line

Prior to adidas manufacturing his signature T-Mac joints, Tracy rocked the Mad Handles before being presented with the ultra-comfy T-Mac I's. McGrady's sneaker appeal grew (LeBron even had custom SVSM T-Mac's that not even Tracy owned) as he racked up several scoring titles for the Orlando Magic and outshined everyone in 2004 during the sneaker showcase of all sneaker showcases, the NBA All-Star game. 'Mac sported a pair of mismatched red and blue T-Mac III's while his Stretch Armstrong-reaching powers propelled him to two off-the-glass stuffs in-between his abuse of Kevin Garnett. The T-Mac line shut down with McGrady's back, but before the final straw broke it all up, Tracy was straight nasty.



Grant Hill, FILA GH Series

Before Grant Hill had his ankles robotically replaced during his resurrection in Phoenix, his FILA sigs were the talk of the '90s. Him and Jerry Stackhouse guided the brand to success before Mr. Duke planned a premature playoff comeback despite his hobbles – the result derailed his Piston career and sneaker status, and his later bolting to Orlando didn't help much with his feet as Magic fans were robbed of the highlight factory that could have been witnessed 82 times a year in the Tracy McGrady / Grant Hill combo. Regardless, his FILA joints are still widely recognized to this day for their killer lace schemes and early use of patent leather. OK, Mr. Laimbeer.



Larry Johnson, Converse Aero Jam

With probably the best sneaker campaign to feature a full-grown man dressed as a woman ever developed, Converse decided that putting Larry Johnson in a dress and giving him some pointy glasses was a great way to advertise shoes. If you didn't watch basketball but got down with TGIF night in the '90s, you sure as hell saw Grandmama and her gold fronts team up with Steve Urkel to put a spanking on some Chi-town urbanites – Grandmama even blocked one poor soul four straight times before Urkel won the day by dunking on Eddie Winslow in a John Starks-on-Michael Jordan-esque deathblow. Unfortunately for Converse, Grandmama passed away due to back injuries around the same time that Larry Johnson got traded to the Knicks. We still mourn for her.



Yao Ming, Reebok

After rocking Nikes during his rookie year, Yao (above with the Reebok KFS Dragon ATR Elites) spurned the brand he had worn all his life to sign with Reebok, even though they offered him less money. His first Reebok shoe, the High Post, was a very generic looking sneaker in comparison to the later dragon-tagged joints they have made for him since. Although the NBA is still hugely popular in China, their Reebok sneaker market definitely took a hit when Yao hung it up.



Bo Jackson, Nike SC Trainer

Mike's sneaker legacy may have smoked Bo Jackson's SC Trainer scheme, however Bo merks Michael in terms of baseball skill. Before his hip got taken, Jackson beasted the NFL during his football days when he used to rock pads as a "hobby" in between cracking baseball bats for the Royals. Even though it's been damn near 22 years since Jackson was getting propers from all sorts of key athletic figures during his "Bo Knows" days, him and MJ are still considered the forefathers of Nike athlete marketing. His SC Trainer I and IIs are still hot in the game, the latter of which was recently re-released for the first time this past year. It's pretty safe to say that without Bo, Nike would not have been as successful outside the basketball realm – And if you don't know, now you know.



Ken Griffey Jr., Nike Swingman Series Junior's

Nike line remains as one of the illest ever assembled by the brand, with the constant debate always coming up regarding his signature joints: Doper shoe, the Griffey I's or Griffey II's? After The Kid (pictured above with the Nike Diamond Fury) got transferred from the left coast to wear Red for Cincinnati, his season ending injuries from '02-04 saw a drop in his popularity for a minute. Nevertheless Junior now remains fresh as ever even though he recently put his cleats away and retired this past year after a return to Starbucks land. His "Emerald" Max I's re-released earlier back in August, and if you didn't cop 'em then you're likely SOL for a while.



Penny Hardaway, Nike Air Max Penny Series; Nike Air Foamposite One

Unlike the Fun Police and the Roswell Rayguns, the Nike Lil Penny ads will never be forgotten to sneaker enthusiasts of all ages. The Air Penny I, perhaps the most prized sneaker of the lot, recently made another comeback, thus solidifying the legacy of Hardaway's signature line. Before his left knee got stolen by injuries, Anfernee (shown above with the Penny IIs) was jaw-droppingly filthy – just ask LeBron James, who was Hardaway's No. 1 fan as a young'n in Akron. Oh, and extra points if you can name what SLAM ish is hidden under the pillow.