



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: GinaMarie Scarpa
gmscarpa@NABIFoundation.org
TEL: (480) 446-7052 Ext. 103

Native American Basketball Invitational (NABI) Strong Comeback for 2021

**—Phoenix Suns, Phoenix Mercury, Gila River Indian Community, NIKE N7, Seminole Tribe of Florida
and Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation Present 18th Annual Tournament and Education Summit —**

PHOENIX, AZ, April 27, 2021—The [NABI Foundation](http://www.NABIFoundation.org) is pleased to announce that 128 all-Native American and Indigenous basketball teams will travel to Phoenix to compete in this summer's invitational and educational youth summit scheduled for July 11-17. Comprised of more than 1,300 boys and girls ages 14-19, the teams represent North American tribal youth from communities throughout Arizona and as far away as the Seminole Tribe of Florida.

President and CEO of NABI Foundation, GinaMarie Scarpa, describes last year's challenging decision to cancel NABI programs due to COVID. She says, "It was devastating to our players, their immediate families and their extended supportive tribal family. We have no regrets though. To keep our youth and communities safe, we did what we had to."

Enthusiastic about the upcoming NABI week, she delights in saying, "This year's registration turnout is a testament to the significance of NABI among Indigenous youth who love playing basketball and who benefit tremendously from exploring the higher educational opportunities NABI's educational summit opens them to."

Scarpa, who is half Indigenous on her mother's side, co-founded NABI with Phoenix Suns legend Mark West. With a smile-turned-laugh, she recalls fondly, "In my garage, we were an odd trifecta of talent. Our friend, the late Scott Podleski, saw a need. I brought non-profit experience as the former Executive Director of the A.C. Green Foundation and Mark, who is a huge advocate for higher education, well, played a lot of basketball and knew the game."

Proudly, she says, "NABI has established itself as the gold standard of youth tournament play and education. Our players, their families and our tribal communities look forward every summer to a week of hoops, participation in the educational summit and a visit to the fifth largest city in the U.S."

"Keep in mind," she remarks, "some of our youth have never left their tribal lands."

Consistent with its concern for the health and safety of participants, the Foundation will mandate a mask policy and, this year only, offer a scaled-down version of its educational program. The Olympic style *Parade of Teams*, hosted by the Heard Museum, will not be open to the public.

"This could change," says Lynette Lewis, Director of Program Operations.

Born and raised on Navajo Nation, Lewis continues, "We're a nimble organization that pivots easily. We hope that by July full-capacity gyms will be allowed and fans, who are overwhelmingly families and community members of participating tribal teams, will be able to attend games and other events."

NABI 2021 has applied a full-court press! While Native American families have been among the hardest hit in the U.S. by COVID, the basketball-playing youth of these communities remain eager to play. "Rezball," which is how many NABI players learn traditional basketball, and basketball itself are a meaningful, hope-filled athletic outlet, more than NABI's founders ever could have imagined. A return to Phoenix allows access to more gyms and other facilities essential to accommodating NABI's rapid pre-COVID growth. A Phoenix home base also lays the groundwork for the goal of doubling the number of participating teams to 256 beginning in 2022.

In development is an annual All-Native-American adult NABI tournament (21+). A competition that taps 17 years of NABI alumni players, a NABI adult tournament lends itself well to the already-popular Native American adult tournament circuit. Funds generated by this future endeavor will benefit the NABI Foundation youth programs.

NABI week tips off July 11, 2021. Championship games are scheduled for July 17 at the newly-renovated [Phoenix Suns Arena](http://www.phoenixsuns.com). Find a full schedule of events in late June on the NABI Foundation website.

Major sponsors include [KONE Corporation](http://www.konecorp.com), [Freeport McMoRan](http://www.freeportmcmoran.com), [Rolling Plains Construction](http://www.rollingplainsconstruction.com), Arviso-Okland Construction, the [HEARD Museum](http://www.heardmuseum.org) and [Maricopa Community Colleges](http://www.maricopa.edu).

#

About: The week-long Native American Basketball Invitational (NABI), established in 2003, is the largest Indigenous basketball competition in North America. NABI showcases the athletic talent of Indigenous youth in addition to producing a motivational Educational Youth Summit and College & Career Fair concurrent with tournament week. Among many noteworthy speakers, Dale Brown, iconic coach of Louisiana State University, Iron Man A.C. Green of Lakers and Suns fame, and Ann Meyers Drysdale, sportscaster, Olympic athlete and Basketball Hall of Famer have addressed NABI players at the summit. NABI awards annual college scholarships, and the summit component of NABI week includes essential sessions about health and wellness. Exposure to educational opportunities and topical workshops specific to Native Americans and Indigenous peoples set NABI youth on a path to seeing their full potential.

For more information or to become a sponsor and/or donor, please visit www.NABIFoundation.org.
NABI Foundation is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization. Tax Exempt #43-1967299