



Rob Beiltema/Metroland

Mississauga fans came to celebrate the NBA D-League championship with the Raptors 905 Friday at Celebration Square. The team shot includes staff and Nathan Smith, a Port Credit boy with Cystic Fibrosis and an honorary team member who got to hold the trophy.

# Port Credit boy with cystic fibrosis honoured by Raptors 905

MAIN COLPITTS

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It was fairly easy for Corey Smith to strike up a conversation with Raptors 905 coach Jerry Stackhouse during the NBA D-League season.

Smith is a big NCAA Division I basketball fan, and his favourite team happens to be Stackhouse's alma mater, the University of North Carolina.

"One thing led to another, he got an understanding of our family situation, and he became not just a great basketball coach, but a friend of our family, too," Smith said thinking back to their first conversation.

The family situation Smith refers to is the challenges they go through as their nine-year-old son Nathan lives with cystic fibrosis.

It's a life-altering deal for everyone involved, but the Port Credit family enjoys a reprieve every time they sit courtside for Raptors 905 home games at the Hershey Centre.

They were there on April 27 to

watch them defeat the Rio Grande Valley Vipers for the NBA D-League championship.

Many players were leaders on the team throughout the playoffs, including finals MVP Pascal Siakam, Brady Heslip, E.J. Singler, Fred VanVleet and Bruno Caboclo. They all earned kudos from Stackhouse.

But as they were all celebrating, Stackhouse immediately wanted to acknowledge Nathan, the team's inspiration and an honorary team member.

"We take so much for granted when we've got healthy kids and just go about our daily lives. But there's people who are really dealing with some things," said Stackhouse, who played 18 years in the NBA and showed great humility while coaching in the D-League and by forming a bond with the Smith family.

"Just for him, that outlet of bringing him to the games and seeing the enjoyment on his face, it's a break for them from all of the work they have to do 24 hours a day."

April 28 was Nathan's day and

he was front and centre when the Raptors 905 team celebrated their victory in front of hundreds of fans at Celebration Square.

He was called up to the stage by Stackhouse, given his 2017 championship shirt and got to hold the trophy during a photo-op.

The friendship they've built is something Stackhouse cherishes and the feeling is mutual.

"He's a great guy, not just a great coach, but a nice person and a friend of our family," Nathan said. "When he shouted out to me, I was almost in tears. I was just so happy."

Nathan claims John Jordan is his favourite player on the team, and has a signed jersey from the point guard among his many gifts from the team.

He was also carrying around a team-signed photo of him from earlier this season, when he was invited into the locker-room to do the bottle flip, a pre-game ritual of the team.

Aside from the final, that experience is a highlight of Nathan's season with the team.



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Nathan Smith, a Port Credit boy with Cystic Fibrosis and an honorary team member, was called up to the stage for a hat and t-shirt.

"When we were doing that, I needed them to win, because I would rather go into a happy locker-room afterwards," he said. "I was so stressed to see if they would win, but they did."

Paul Bios. SMITH, Nathan