



## PERSONALITY OF THE MONTH



### Sani Sakakini

If you spent enough time at Ramallah's Sirriyeh Club during the early 2000s, you may have spotted a tall young man named Sani Sakakini playing basketball. Almost every day after school, this young man played on the club's pavement, scoring goal after goal against his friends. But he had something bigger in mind. Very few of the onlookers may have expected that this individual dreamt of becoming a professional athlete. But through years of devotion, Sani Sakakini is now the first professional basketball player to hail from Palestine.

His first game was at age six. And a mere decade later, at the remarkably young age of 16, he participated in his first tournament in Jordan as part of the Palestinian National Team. Interest in this young marvel spiked, and soon thereafter, he was offered a spot on the Jordanian team. From there, a prosperous career took off, and international attention grew. Several seasons later, Sani was signed to teams in Lebanon and China, then Jordan again.

Unlike many players in Palestine, to whom basketball is a secondary profession, Sani is entirely committed. "For me, it's like having a 9 to 5 job at a bank," he explains. Upon waking, Sani heads to the gym for strength exercises, followed by specialized skill training for basketball. And after some rest, he takes to the court for several hours of basketball, six days a week. All in all, his training amounts to 6 to 7 hours daily, surely enough to qualify as

a full-time job! After strenuous amounts of work, the one day off in his week is often spent barbecuing with friends or swimming and relaxing by the Dead Sea.

Sani currently plays for a team in Jiangsu, China. But this has carried with it quite a bit of culture shock. "Everything is so different from Palestine," he explains, commenting on the food and customs. "Except for the ball, of course. It's the international language."

In the summer of 2016, Sani will participate in the NBA Summer League, a platform that many players have used to get into the NBA. More than a decade since starting his career, Sani has no intentions of slowing down, and continues to aim higher.

"Where I am today didn't come from nowhere. I didn't go to bed and wake up like this. I worked hard, harder than anyone can imagine," Sani explains. "But because I knew I wanted this, I overcame every obstacle. Hopefully people will hear some great news about the first professional basketball player from Palestine, and raise their heads high."

Once he's done playing professionally, he hopes to one day establish a sports academy in Palestine, helping our youth achieve greater feats, ensuring that he is the first, but surely not the last professional athlete to come out of Palestine.