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A NEW TEAM, A NEW HOME AND A NEW BABY. LIFE IS GOING FULL SPEED FOR THE PHOENIX SUNS' **GRANT HILL** — AND HE'S JUST ENJOYING THE RIDE

**STORY** Jimmy Magahern

welcome to

*Arizona*

country

**FEW MEN** — not even most 6-foot-8, seven-time NBA All-Stars — could talk their pregnant wives into moving to Phoenix in the heat of the summer.

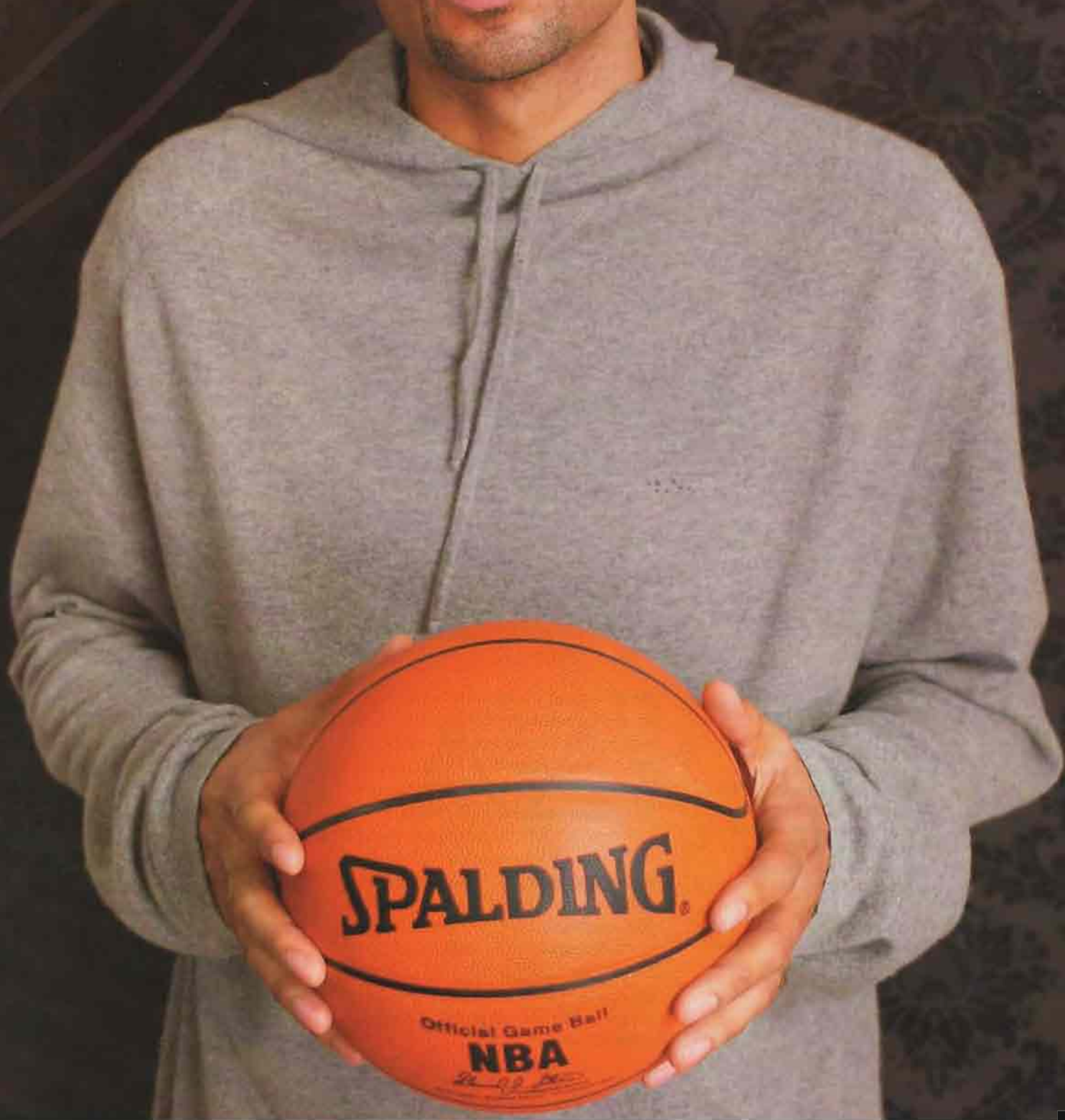
Especially when the wife is a Canadian-born singer who, despite having toured much of the world, has managed to steer clear of the Valley's triple-digit temperatures for all of her 32 years.

And did we mention she was pregnant? Only weeks away from giving birth to the couple's second child.

Then again, few men are as persuasive as Grant Hill, the newest weapon in the Phoenix Suns' arsenal and the guy the team is banking on to help it take the final step in this season's playoffs.

In July, the Suns signed Hill to a one-year, \$1.8 million deal, with a player option for a second

profile  
RISING SUN





LASTING IMPRESSIONS BY ELLYN



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DAVID WALLACE

**(Clockwise from top)** The Hill family: Grant, Tamia and Myla. Formerly with the Orlando Magic, Hill shoots over Suns forward Shawn Marion during a matchup in December 2002. Five years later, Hill speaks at a press conference at the US Airways Center after signing with the team in July.

season at roughly \$2 million. In August, Hill, 35, and his wife, R&B recording artist Tamia, signed off on another deal that — Suns fans hope — might signal the NBA star plans to stick around even longer: the purchase of a \$3.7 million home in Paradise Valley.

Does Hill's hefty contribution to the local real-estate economy mean the high-scoring rebound star intends to finish out his playing years with the Suns and retire to the Valley's golf courses?

"Who knows?" Hill says, adding that he has yet to be bit by the golfing bug and that the couple, married since 1999, still maintain a home in Orlando, where they've lived for the past seven years.

"Tamia's only been here for two or three weeks, and it's her first time ever being in Phoenix. So we're still getting adjusted. Right now," he adds, calling from the new house in mid-September, "it's hot!"

Signed to the Suns just 10 days after becoming a free agent, and with Tamia entrenched in Orlando during the final weeks of pregnancy, Hill was forced to house-hunt largely on his own. And, by all accounts, he found a beaut: a 6,786-square-foot custom home surrounded by lush trees just west of Camelback Mountain. According to the Realtor and former owner of the home, Hill signed off on the sale just hours after the birth of Lael Rose, who joined big sister Myla, 5, on Aug. 9.

Understandably, the whirlwind of activity has given the family little time to settle in. Hill has heard that some of his fellow Suns players live nearby, but as yet hasn't had many opportunities to meet the neighbors.

"A few of the guys have started to trickle in, but I don't quite know where everybody lives yet," he says of his teammates.

So far, the Hills have been busy personalizing the house, which came furnished, but without a basketball hoop and — more important to Hill — without any of the cultural

touchstones he's accustomed to.

Raised by a Yale man, former NFL running back Calvin Hill, and a Wellesley woman (mother Jane, who roomed with Hillary Rodham Clinton as a freshman at the liberal arts college), Hill grew up in a household where academics and an appreciation of the arts were stressed right along with athletics. It's a balanced view he hopes to impart to his daughters, not to mention the millions of impressionable kids who admire his prowess on the court.

In the past three years, Hill's collection of African-American art has been the subject of a traveling exhibition and a coffee-table book.

"I'd like to inspire other people who wouldn't normally go into a museum or pick up a book of art," he says. "Sometimes people will look into things they normally wouldn't because a professional athlete has expressed interest in it."

Most of his personal collection, which features the work of such African-American masters as Romare Bearden, Elizabeth Catlett, John Coleman and Hughie Lee Smith, remains on the walls of the Orlando house, and Hill, who majored in African-American history at Duke, admits it's been tough finding any Scottsdale galleries that specialize in the field.

"I have been over to the Phoenician, and they have a really nice Native American collection," Hill says, noting a particular fondness for Allan Houser's bronze sculptures. "Who knows? Maybe the focus of my collecting will change a little bit now that I'm here."

As for how long that might be, Hill seems genuinely uncertain. Entering his 13th year in a pro career that — beginning with his bowing out of the 2000 Summer Olympics due to a badly sprained ankle — has been hampered by injuries, Hill is determined to stay healthy and strong for the Suns.

"I fought hard to get back on the court, so I'm going to give the team everything I've got."

Whether his "team" at home will be able to survive that other Phoenix sun is another matter.

"We may end up staying. We like it here thus far. But we'll wait and see what happens. One thing I've learned," he adds, with a knowing laugh, "is not to predict the future." //



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