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## **BCI Loop: What's Possible? Why Now?**

An Interview with Mike Wilks

BCI Loop is a fraternity for professional basketball players to find common ground, encourage each other in their unique roles as leaders, and – with a compassionate but firm attitude – challenge each other on topics related to integrity, accountability, values, and faith. BCI board member Mike Wilks is also one of BCI Loop's Primes: athlete leaders who, without judgment, make themselves available for spiritual and practical support of players "on the path." Recently, Mike sat down with BCI president Kathy Scheuerman to talk about why *now* is the time for pro athletes to get real with each other.

KS: Mike, what's the relationship between your faith and your professional career?

MW: My Christian walk has been a big part of my journey as a pro basketball player. I believe that God has given all of us gifts and abilities that he desires us to use for His glory, and I feel that way about basketball. He's allowed me to play for several years in the NBA and overseas because it's a platform for influence and drawing people to Him. Whether we like it or not, pro players are role models. Kids are looking up to us and we have a responsibility to live a certain kind of life, even though the pro-level environment may not always support that. Being a Christian takes it a step further for me; I know Christ wants people to see Him in me.

KS: It can be so challenging for players who want to take that step.

MW: It can be difficult at times because the environment isn't always conducive to having a strong Christian walk. You really need brothers around you to encourage you to walk with integrity, helping you grow stronger in areas where you may be weak. It helps having brothers praying with and for you. BCI Loop is a place to find that encouragement.

KS: You have an exclusive peer group. How do players relate to each other spiritually on the inside?

MW: As players we tend to connect well with each other. There is a certain level of credibility since we face many of the same issues. We develop relationships that allow us to pull from each other's experiences – the challenges and also the victories. You can get valuable insight by asking fellow players how they overcame, and what steps they took to grow in a particular area. Everybody has trials and struggles from time to time. You realize, "This player overcame their struggles through the grace of God; I can overcome mine, too." You have brothers that you can go to for prayer and encouragement. The bonds we make as players can play a major role in our spiritual growth.

KS: So many pros play overseas. How far do those bonds reach?

MW: Across the world. I've been there, thousands of miles from home and out of my comfort zone. Having support from other players is crucial – you just have to find and latch on to other brothers. In Poland, I had a fellow believer on my team. We helped each other deal with issues we faced both on and off the court. We also connected with several players based in other countries, conducting Bible studies via Skype. We all knew how important this connection was for us.

KS: What feelings were you facing?

MW: Loneliness and isolation. I was away from my family for long periods of time and I had to adapt to living in another country. Often times as pro athletes we think we can handle more than we really can. We don't want to appear weak or needy. We're taught to play through pain or injury – to suck it up. This can carry over into other parts of our lives, where we don't always speak up when we should. BCI Loop, with its vision, reach, and commitment to new communication technologies, can help guys reach out more comfortably.

KS: Admitting vulnerability can be difficult for professional athletes. What role does faith play?

MW: The more you grow in your faith, the more you realize how much you need God. You realize how much more vulnerable you would be without God in your life.

KS: And if a player realizes that the way he's doing things isn't working?

MW: If he's not already a Christian, then hopefully there are Christian guys on his team that he would be drawn to for encouragement. Or maybe someone will step up and approach him, challenge him, and share how Christ can impact his life. On professional ball teams you're around your teammates so much that there's a great opportunity to get to know each other. So there should come a time where you are comfortable enough to reach out to a teammate if necessary.

KS: Your life is a testament to your faith. If you're not comfortable, there's a reason.

MW: In general, most teams don't have a whole lot of players who are outspoken about their faith. You may have a couple of guys that are openly committed to God, but many guys feel like it's easier to just go with the crowd. Trying to live and walk according to the Word of God takes commitment. You have to be confident and secure in what you believe. You have to be willing to go against the grain and stand out at times. My experience has taught me that action speaks louder than words. Players will respect you, even if their beliefs are different, as long as your life lines up with what you claim to believe.

That's why BCI Loop is so important. The fellowship it provides strengthens us and helps us walk with faith and godliness. BCI Loop is needed right now in our world.

KS: Why now?

MW: There's never been a more important time to influence the influencers. It started with Coach Sharm and it must continue with us. He was the one who went out and connected with players. Really connected. He understood the importance of finding real relationships in the pro world. He'd ask, simply, "How's your walk?" He encouraged us and prayed with us. He embodied BCI Loop and now we're carrying on his legacy because we're called to do it. We're like mini Sharms now, connecting with each other and always growing as we try to have a positive impact the way that Sharm had on us.

KS: BCI Loop is player driven, and you guys are inspiring a lot of people.

MW: God was already leading us to do what we're doing, but He gave us BCI Loop to help us extend our reach. With your support, we're much more efficient and effective as we fulfill the purpose that God has called us to do. We're stronger.

KS: It takes a great team to change the world. It's a tough job. Is it too tough?

MW: I don't believe it's too tough. When something is "too" anything, people think it's not possible. Instead, I talk about difficulties or challenges. I don't believe that God would call us to do something that wasn't possible. And we are already having an impact. We're already proving that the challenges are worth the work.

KS: And the world is still listening.

MW: Absolutely. Everyone, Christian or not, wants to see more integrity in professional sports. It's encouraging. We all want to know that a better way is possible. Player-to-player, it's the same. For example, I never claim to be perfect, but players have expressed to me how they've been encouraged by what Christ has done in my life. A younger player contemplating marriage expressed how he was encouraged by my faithfulness in my marriage. I don't beat anyone over the head with my faith; I just live my life in a way that strives to be like Christ and give Him credit. People listen more to what you do than to what you say.

KS: You're leading by example, showing that you're willing to work hard where it counts.

MW: Anything worth having or doing is going to take hard work. Providing the opportunity for salvation wasn't an easy task; Christ laid down His life for us. Now it's our job to keep encouraging each other. It starts with just one connection between guys, which leads to others. People get encouraged and say, "Hey, maybe I can live this Christian walk."

KS: How far do you think this reaches?

MW: By holding each other accountable, players are setting a standard for the next generation. We're giving them something to strive for. Kids want to know what kind of cars we drive, what kind of house we live in. They also want to know what kind of men we are. What kind of husband and father we are. We have so much influence that our behavior seems to give them permission to behave in the same ways. So we have to be careful. We're influencing kids – and each other – even when we don't realize it. I actually feel encouraged and motivated by the way kids watch us. I see it as an opportunity.

KS: Who motivated and encouraged you?

MW: My mom played a big part in my life. She brought me up in the church. She instilled values in me, such as treating people the way that I wanted to be treated. She instilled the importance of education, and not to “put all my eggs in one basket” – meaning basketball. So, from a young age, I looked at basketball as a tool – a way to earn a scholarship to college and get out of the inner city of Milwaukee. I thought that if I did well in school and on the court, I’d earn my way out. I didn’t think about the NBA like a lot of kids do today. I was practical; I just wanted a quality job and a quality life. In 1999, during my sophomore year in college, I gave my life to Christ. From then on I began looking at things a lot differently.

KS: What changed for you?

MW: As my walk with Christ deepened, I realized that, with God, anything is possible. My motivation shifted more towards pleasing God and seeking His will. Matthew 6:33 became my focus: “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” I strived to keep that focus, which was often difficult with all the distraction of my new career. God opened doors for me. He showed Himself to me through basketball. When I graduated, undrafted from a small school, I wasn’t very known in the sports world. But God provided me with amazing opportunities, and allowed me to play on the highest level. Year after year, despite being a free agent, God empowered me to defy the odds and make another team. I felt like I was just along for the ride. I love and thank God for all He’s done in my life.

KS: You never gave up.

MW: At times I got discouraged, but God would renew my strength and will to keep going. We can’t give up, ever. People are waiting on us, and God has planned for us to cross paths. If you give up on what you’re called to do, and what He’s given you the resources to do, it’s like giving up on the very reason for living. Where you have talent, use it for His glory. Where you have time and money, spend it on His will. Giving up, even if the challenge seems very complicated or tough, is just not an option.

KS: What would you say to a pro player who, like Sharm talked about in *Step Up Your Game*, feels like he’s got a God-shaped hole in his heart?

MW: You’re not alone. Reach out to your peers because we get it. We care. With BCI Loop, you’re going to find an environment that’s welcoming but also *real*. You won’t feel judged or condemned. Instead, you’ll be challenged to grow and get better. To *be* better. You already have the instinct to improve. It’s part of what makes you a successful athlete. And your spiritual life isn’t any different. BCI Loop is a place where it’s safe to be vulnerable and ask questions. You’ll be understood, you’ll hear stories that you can relate to. You’ll find new strength by connecting to people who are going through the same things you are. Whether you’re new to the path or interested to “stepping up your game,” BCI Loop will meet you right where you are and support you all the way.