

Growing up with a black father and a white mother for Luke Whitehead presented obstacles in the early 1980s.

“There was pressure. Often there would be pressure to figure us out, ‘Are you white? Are you black?’ But I never chose a side, because I belong to both sides,” said Whitehead, a former University of Louisville basketball player. “I had really strong parents that instilled confidence and positivity into me. My mother would always say ‘You have the best of both worlds.’ ”

In 2010, after nearly a decade playing pro basketball in the U.S., South Korea, Germany and Australia, Whitehead turned that pressure into his passion and launched the rapidly growing social and cultural movement MixedNation – a heavily engaged online community of more than a half-million members, with the goal of promoting diversity, and to educate, inspire, and connect people from all racial and cultural backgrounds.

On [MixedNation.com](#), people of all heritages share their personal stories, experts share tips and tools for raising mixed-race families. Members share everything from inspiring quotes and poetry to artwork, expressing how they feel about their place in our often racially hyperconscious society.

Celebrities such as Laila Ali, Tyson Beckford and Garcelle Beauvais are all donning T-shirts and hats with a powerful message created by Whitehead. MixedNation’s two most celebrated slogans are Beautifully Blended and their new, most popular Eracism logo.

Whitehead’s father broke color barriers in the 1960s as a star player also on the University of Louisville’s basketball team.

“Basketball was really my main focus. I found out I was blessed to follow in my father’s footsteps to go to the University of Louisville on a basketball scholarship, and I graduated with a degree in communications,” Whitehead said. “When I look back, I didn’t realize that until somewhat recently that my father helped break the color barrier at the University of Louisville by being one of the first African-Americans to ever play for the university, the first year that he played. He didn’t even know when he agreed to take the scholarship and come from Cincinnati, Ohio, to Louisville, Kentucky, that that was going to be the very first year that they integrated the team. It was sports. I loved it. I was considered a prodigy at a very young age, and played varsity basketball in the eighth grade.”



Luke Whitehead #24 of the University of Louisville Cardinals looks to pass the ball while he is going out of bounds against the Cincinnati Bearcats on January 21, 2004 at Freedom Hall in Louisville, Kentucky.

Whitehead’s experiences ignited a passion for teaching diversity and spreading a message of love and acceptance. His grandparents disowned his mother for marrying his father. His father’s family supported the marriage and opened their hearts to his mother.

“When I look back on not having my white grandparents in my life, it was pretty sad. That was another thing. You know, you figure things out as you get older. When they weren’t around growing up, for me, it was kind of out of sight, out of mind. I never really knew my mom’s parents, and they weren’t around, and I could care less, because they were there. But as I got older, I realized how much of a sacrifice, how much of a big deal that would be for my mom. I couldn’t imagine my parents not speaking to me anymore and losing my relationship with my parents over my significant other. So I really respect and love and cherish my mother so much more just knowing that what she sacrificed even from my existence.”

Whitehead said MixedNation is all-inclusive.

“You don’t have to be mixed to be part of MixedNation,” he said. “MixedNation just really representing the mixed nation that we live in and the mixed world that we live in, with all these beautiful cultures coming together. That’s really what it’s all about. It’s celebrating diversity and promoting cultural harmony. That’s my mission with MixedNation. I think that’s what really instilled me to create MixedNation, realizing that kids have at time a problem with feeling either left out or feeling not black enough or not white enough. I just wanted create something special that says, ‘Be proud of whatever you may be.’ ”

Whitehead recently started doing the [Louisville Legends Basketball Camp](#), where former Louisville Cardinal players and coaches and people associated with the program unite and teach kids the fundamentals of basketball.

“Our last camp was really an awesome success. We had Denny Crum as a part of it, and Luke Hancock, who won national championships, not too long ago here,” Whitehead said. “They came out and we had like 130 kids, and it was just a really great time. That’s pretty much the extent of my basketball involvement at this point, doing camps once or twice a year, and then just playing a little bit here and there just to stay in shape.”

The hardest part of Whitehead’s playing career was an injury that almost ended it.

“I probably experienced the worst fall in basketball history. I went up to catch an alley-oop, and I threw it in and kind of got under-clipped by the other team. I almost kind of tried to jump over the other team’s player, and my legs got clipped, and I came down and landed on my head. It was a really bad fall.



“I didn’t have major injuries from it. Thank God I was able to recover from it and walk away from the injury. But that was one of those things that, when I did finally watch it, I fell to my knees and thanked God for protecting me and blessing me to be able to walk away. I know there’s plenty of people that have died or have been confined to a wheelchair for a much less fall than that.”

Whitehead said that moment put things in perspective for him.

“It’s had a big effect on my life. It just gave me that strength in knowing God has my back and all that. One of the reasons I created MixedNation is because of my experiences. My friends were either black or white, and I was sort of caught in the middle. At times, it would feel like I didn’t really fit in. I’d feel like I wasn’t black enough, or feel like I wasn’t white enough. Feel, what am I? Very unsure about my blended culture and race.”

Traveling inspired Whitehead to create the diversity celebrating campaign.

“I started it out as a social networking type of website, where it was a multicultural, multiracial type of community, and then I switched it over, it became more of a movement,” Whitehead said. “We realized that Facebook started to have our most action and engagement, where we have close to 500,000 people worldwide on our Facebook page now.”

Having to choose black or white for Whitehead was difficult, but he was able to overcome the situation.

“At a young age, a lot of time, it goes off of your environment. I heard a lot of people have different stories. But if you grow up in a predominantly black neighborhood, then you’ll gravitate toward your black side. If you grow up in a predominantly white neighborhood, you’ll gravitate that way. I think, for me, it was something I always had friends of all different races and cultures and things of that nature, but I do know that I tended to gravitate my black side more because of my skin color, because of my melanin, because of my tan and the way I looked. So I know for a lot of people, it depends on exactly what you might be mixed with, but everybody has their own struggle. There are people who are mixed with Asian, and they might be white and Asian, or black and Asian, and not necessarily feel like they could fit in enough with their Asian side, or with their white side.”

Whitehead said the best piece of advice he ever received came from his mother.

“The one thing that I remember the most is my mom saying, ‘You’re the best of both worlds.’ I just remember that, and like I said before, when she would tell me that, for a parent of a multiracial child, they have to think of different things they can do and say. Some don’t say anything. Some don’t know what to say. But I remember my mother would say that to me, from time to time, and it stuck with me when I got older, and it helped me to turn it into a thing of strength and power and beauty and goodness, rather than a negative thing. I think that would be the best piece of advice, even though it’s not, it’s more of a praise than a real piece of advice. For me, I feel like it’s something that stuck with me and was memorable, because I don’t remember having too many conversations about it, but I do remember.”

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