



Kurt Schneider

**EDITORS' NOTE** Kurt Schneider has held his current post since May 2007. He served as an Executive Vice President of Marketing of World Wrestling Entertainment Inc. from February 2003 to May 2007. Prior to this, Schneider was Chief Executive Officer of Asimba, Inc. for two years and its President. He served as Vice President of Marketing at Fox Sports Net and as Director, Corporate Alliances at Disney. Schneider serves as a Director of Harlem Globetrotters International, Inc., and served on The Apollo Theater Foundation board for 10 years. He holds a Bachelor's degree in English Literature from Dartmouth College.

**COMPANY BRIEF** The Harlem Globetrotters® ([harlemglobetrotters.com](http://harlemglobetrotters.com)) are celebrating their 90th anniversary, continuing a world famous tradition of ball-handling wizardry, basketball artistry, and one-of-a-kind family entertainment that continues to thrill fans of all ages. Harlem Globetrotters International, Inc. is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Herschend Enterprises, the largest family-owned themed entertainment company in the U.S. Throughout their history, the original Harlem Globetrotters have showcased their iconic talents in 122 countries and territories on six continents, often breaking down cultural and societal barriers while providing fans with their first-ever basketball experience. Proud inductees of the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame, the Globetrotters have entertained hundreds of millions of fans – among them popes, kings, queens, and presidents – over nine thrilling decades.

**What's the trick to remaining relevant but also not losing that Harlem Globetrotters history?**

We're celebrating our 90th year from now through 2016. We have outlasted world wars, the Depression, and recessions, and we never try to grasp onto a fad. We're authentic in our brand, which is wholesome family entertainment.

Because we're sports entertainment and we can choreograph the entire guest experience, we can guarantee an amazing time. Everyone has a Harlem Globetrotters story and they're all positive because of that.

# Sports Entertainment

**An Interview with Kurt Schneider,  
Chief Executive Officer, Harlem Globetrotters International, Inc.**

**How important is the actual basketball component and how do you balance the game with entertainment?**

There are three components to being a Globetrotter: being a great basketball player, a great entertainer, and a great person. No matter what we do, the ball has to go in the hoop. The game gives us the construct on which to entertain, but within that construct is where we can do all of our other entertaining – and we are constantly doing good in the communities we visit.

**What made you feel this job would be the right fit and what excited you about this opportunity?**

I wanted a chance to reenergize and regrow something, and take all of my branding, marketing, and ops experience and put it into one brand.

The Globetrotters had their heyday in the '70s and then we lost a whole generation of fans, and we'd been reduced to being a live-event touring troupe.

I implemented a new vision right away – we weren't a basketball team and we weren't a live event touring troupe; we are a global entertainment company, and through that filter, we can find other touchpoints to our fans more than once per year.

**How important was it to communicate that vision and did you have to change a lot of people?**

I laminated the vision on a card and I gave a copy to everyone. The vision was to evolve the company from a live-event touring troupe into a global entertainment company that entertains our fans whenever and wherever they want.

The vision for the company in three words is: "Consistent Consumer Contact." If employees started thinking that way, they would think beyond the game to keep getting in touch with fans whenever and wherever they want.

We didn't have sponsorship sales or brand marketing or licensing, so we created those departments and made sure we had the staff and players on board that embraced the new vision.

**How do you keep that consistent contact?**

We started by changing the product. I wanted to put in a storyline, because I want people that come to our live shows to come every year and turn it into a family tradition. The show producer and I wrote the show together, and we change the story line every year to keep it fresh and engaging.

The next thing was letting people know of our new vision. We've done a lot with the media. We had two players on three different seasons

of *The Amazing Race*, and players have made several cameos on primetime TV, national morning shows, entertainment programs, and kids shows.

We also do a special on ESPN once a year so people can be exposed to the product in an easy way and get involved with it.

We started using the Internet – we have nearly one-and-a-half million fans across major social media platforms, and we are partners with Whistle Sports, YouTube's second-largest sports channel. We're constantly providing our fans with video and information so they can access it at their leisure.

We are doing clinics and camps in the summer, and we have a new product called "The Harlem Globetrotter Experience" – it's a 30-minute performance showcasing highlights from our one-of-a-kind touring show, and we debuted it at Silver Dollar City in Branson, Missouri this past summer to crowds averaging 98 percent capacity.

**How important has it been to bring diversity in?**

We've performed in 122 countries and territories in our history, so we think it's important that diversity shows on the court. We've had nearly 20 internationally born players in our history, and for the past several years, we've had three women on the team. We currently have players ranging from 5-foot-2 to 7-foot-4. We want fans to be able to relate to our players.

**How critical is it to invest in educating players on the legacy of the Globetrotters as a group that gives back?**

We spend a lot of time telling the players what it means to be a Globetrotter. We've had about 700 players in 90 years, so it is an elite group with an historic legacy. We're known as the "Ambassadors of Goodwill"™. We've provided 90 years of smiles, sportsmanship, and service. We combat bullying with our "ABCs of Bullying Prevention" program. We launched a program called S.P.I.N.™ – Some Playtime Is Necessary – which encourages kids to be active. Our Smile Patrol™ visits over 150 children's hospitals each year. Our C.H.E.E.R.™ program, which was designed with assistance from the U.S. Department of Education, helps kids build character, and our Junior Phenom Award honors outstanding contributions by young people. We want our players to know how privileged they are to wear the Harlem Globetrotters uniform and to welcome the responsibilities that come with it. ●