

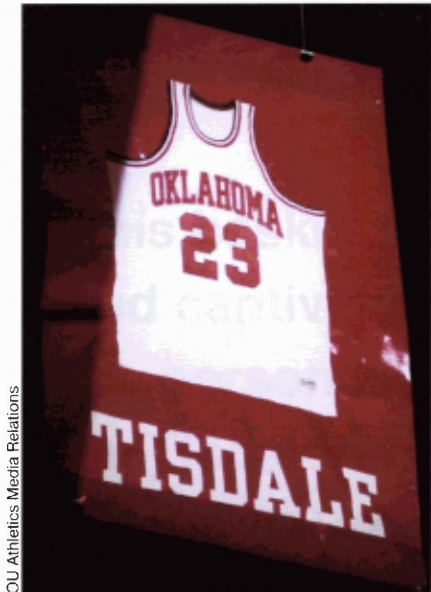
**With his basketball exploits and captivating personality, Wayman Tisdale won Sooner hearts in the 1980s. Now he is back in the spotlight as a musician of considerable note.**

**C**enter court or center stage, Wayman Tisdale has always been at his best when and where the spotlight shines brightest. That was true of his time as a stand-out basketball player both at the University of Oklahoma and professionally, and it is true today of his career as a musician. *continued*

BY JAY C. UPCHURCH

# Plenty to Smile About





OU Athletics Media Relations

Wayman Tisdale's jersey was the first in any sport to be retired at OU in 1997. Along with those of Alvan Adams and Mookie Blaylock, Tisdale's jersey is suspended from the rafters and his heroics recorded in Lloyd Noble Center's Legacy Court.

More than a decade after his departure from the National Basketball Association, Tisdale is still a fan favorite. Only these days, instead of wowing crowds with his familiar left-handed jump shot, the 44-year-old Tulsa native's eclectic blend of jazz, funk, and rhythm and blues has them dancing in the aisles.

"I had a great time in the NBA, but I knew after 12 seasons it was time to move on," says Tisdale, who officially hung up his sneakers for good in 1997. "When that day came, I blew a kiss to the crowd and said my good-byes. It wasn't a sad day because I knew music was just the next natural step in my life."

If not for his music, Tisdale might have been content retiring to his farm near Tulsa and just kicking back to collect on his investments and NBA pension checks. Instead, he embarked on a second career that initially began in 1992 with a few offseason concerts and since has seen him release eight albums, collaborate with jazz giants such as Eric Benet, David Sanborn, George Duke and Dave Koz,

Rendezvous Entertainment



## wayman Way Up! tisdale

and score two chart-topping radio singles in "Can't Hide Love" and "Ain't No Stoppin' Us Now."

Tisdale has parlayed his dynamic skills as a lead bass guitarist and his unique talent for song writing into a winning formula that keeps him doing what he has always believed he was born to do—entertain.

And of course, there is that winsome smile and charismatic personality—Tisdale's trademarks since the first day he arrived on the OU campus in the fall of 1982 and won the hearts of Sooners fans everywhere.

"Wayman is such a natural entertainer. He has an uncanny ability to connect with an audience," says Tom Braxton, who has played saxophone in Tisdale's band for 16 years. "It's been great fun to watch him make the transition from basketball to being a full-time jazz musician."

Tisdale's off-the-court success is aided by the fact he possesses an engaging quality that has always drawn people to him, wherever he goes.

Through good times, bad times or in-between times, his sunny disposition and seemingly endless supply of positive energy—which Tisdale credits to his deep-seeded Christian faith—have not waned. Evident in his performances on the basketball court, it has continued to manifest itself in his music.

That energy has never been more apparent than in recent months as he faced the biggest challenge of his life. In February 2007, Tisdale was diagnosed with cancer, and despite undergoing months of grueling chemotherapy treatments and rehabilitation for a broken right leg and knee surgery, he has remained ever the optimist.

During a concert in Oklahoma City this spring, Tisdale took time between songs to offer up a little testimonial he hopes will help others who are battling the disease.

"The unknown is always cause for some anxious moments. That's just natural. And we all know cancer doesn't play by the rules," says Tisdale. "Dealing with something like this changes your life. It makes you look at certain things differently

Even Wayman's eyes smile in this cover photo for his 2006 album, "Way Up!"

and makes you appreciate things you might normally take for granted.

"It's tough, but no matter how dark your road, God can help get you through it. I really believe that."

**T**isdale admittedly experienced his share of anxiety in the weeks and months after his leg snapped in half below his right knee while he was walking down some steps at his home in Los Angeles. While early tests failed to determine a cause for his injury, an MRI finally revealed a cyst in his knee that proved to be cancerous, causing the weakening of the bone.

The removal of the cyst was followed by five months of chemo and eventually an eight-hour knee replacement surgery. During that period, Tisdale was forced to cancel more than 40 concert dates and basically put his musical career and normal life on hold.

Faced with his mortality, the 6-foot-9 former power forward did a bit of soul searching that put a few things into perspective. But most importantly, he maintained a positive outlook.

"It would be easy for someone to get down in that situation. Not Wayman," says Braxton. "He never complained. He never felt sorry for himself. He has such a deep faith in God and that has really helped keep him upbeat.

"From the beginning, Wayman always talked about how he was going to beat this disease."

Doctors had advised Tisdale to take some significant time off, and his management group announced last summer that he probably would not be ready to return to the stage until sometime in the spring of 2008. But Tisdale surprised everyone by signing on to play with old friend Dave Koz for a 25-date tour in December.

"It was great. Getting back out there and playing my music was the best therapy I could have," says Tisdale. "This is what I love to do. When you are on tour and you're doing what you love to do,

it's the best feeling in the world. It doesn't really seem like work."

Another key factor in his speedy recovery, according to Tisdale, has been all of the love and support he has received from his family and friends, and fans everywhere.

"I am so appreciative of the love that's been shown to me," says Tisdale, who admittedly spent much of his recovery time reading cards, letters and e-mails from countless well-wishers.

Away from his music, Tisdale credits a healthier diet and Tae Bo workouts as factors in his overall recovery process.



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Sooner fans took basketball great Wayman Tisdale to their hearts the moment he stepped on the Lloyd Noble Center floor in 1982. In his three collegiate seasons, he averaged more than 25 points and 10 rebounds a game, was a three-time All-American, played on the gold medal 1984 Olympic team and was the second player taken in the 1985 NBA draft.

Meanwhile back at home, just being surrounded by Regina, his wife of 27 years, and their four children and infant grandchild has been a blessing.

"I have always been the cornerstone of my family, but all of them have been such a great source of strength for me during this period," says Tisdale, who used some of his time away from the stage last fall to work on his latest CD, appropriately titled "Rebound," just released in June.

With his family back living exclusively in the Tulsa area these days, Tisdale has been able to reconnect with his alma mater on a more regular basis. That also has been bolstered by the fact his oldest daughter, Danielle, graduated from OU in 2007, and a second daughter, Tiffany, is currently attending classes there.

"It's been fun to see two of our girls going to OU, which is obviously a special place for me. I've always said the best decision I ever made was choosing the University of Oklahoma and having the chance to be around some of the greatest people in the world," says Tisdale.

Of course, Tisdale's hoops career with the Sooners is legendary.

He helped transform coach Billy Tubbs' program into a national power almost overnight, and in the process, became the first collegiate player to ever earn consensus All-America honors as a freshman, sophomore and junior.

**T**isdale played on the gold medal-winning 1984 U.S. Olympic basketball team and went on to finish his collegiate career averaging more than 25 points and 10 rebounds a game.

In 1985, Indiana selected Tisdale with the No. 2 overall pick in the NBA Draft. Over the next 12 seasons, he averaged 15 points and six rebounds while playing for the Pacers, Sacramento Kings and Phoenix Suns.

"Wayman had it all. He was charismatic and intelligent and just a wonderful person. Plus, he was a fantastic basketball player in every phase of the game," explains Tubbs, the head coach at OU from 1980 to 1994. "Wayman is probably the biggest reason why OU basketball is on the map from a national standpoint."

Tubbs has kept close tabs on his friend and former player over the years, and he is not surprised by any of the success he has



Jerry Laizure

Sooner super fan and country music star Toby Keith, left, with Wayman Tisdale at a 2008 men's basketball game, is featured on Tisdale's latest album, "Rebound," in a remake of the Barry White classic, "Never, Never Gonna Give You Up."

experienced, or the fact Tisdale has beaten cancer.


"Wayman is from a great family. His parents were wonderful people and a lot of the positive convictions he learned from them helped shape his life and make him a very strong person," says Tubbs.

Tisdale concurs, saying his parents' guidance and his spiritual background have long been sources of great inspiration. They also taught him the importance of a good work ethic and to strive for excellence, which have always been driving forces in his life.

"That is one of the things I am most proud of—I always give my best. I think that consistency has really been beneficial to me over the years, whether in basketball or in my music, or just in everyday life," says Tisdale.

Musically speaking, Tisdale has not quite achieved the same level of acclaim that he did in hoops. But he is definitely working on it. Five of his albums have landed on the Billboard charts, and he believes "Rebound"—which features an R&B cut with longtime friend and fellow Oklahoman Toby Keith on vocals—is his best effort yet.

Although he still has some rehabbing to do on his knee and leg, Tisdale is pressing forward into 2008 with a full slate of tour dates and public appearances on his agenda. His future looks brighter than ever.

"Wayman is such a talented musician. He knows what sounds right and what feels right," adds Braxton. "More than that, Wayman has such a good heart, and that is evident in everything he does in life." 

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