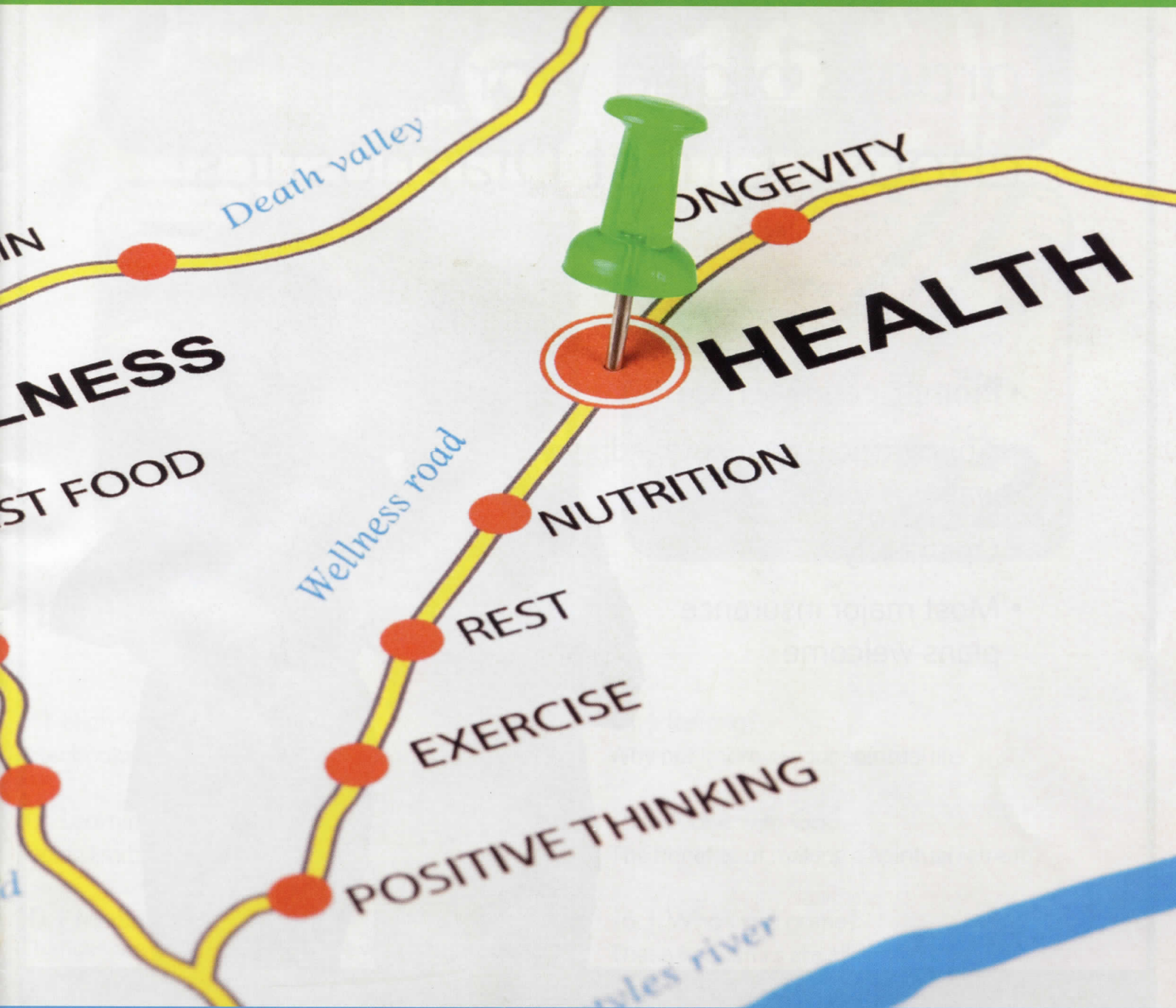


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Granny's Got Game



By ANGELA GORSICA ALFORD

I'm 6 feet, 6 inches tall. Everywhere I go, people ask me two questions: "How tall are you?" and "Do you play basketball?"

Being a basketball player will forever be a part of my identity. I started playing at 10 and went on to play at Vanderbilt University and for USA Basketball in the mid-1990s. Playing has given me self-confidence and pride in my own body, which is so important for girls. It's taught me how to really push myself to my physical and mental limits. It's introduced me to people from a wide variety of backgrounds who I might not have otherwise met. I've got to travel the



country to play, even play abroad.

The lessons I've learned on the court have carried over into my careers, first as an engineer and now as a filmmaker. Lessons like how to get along with different people to achieve a common goal, perseverance and dedication. I'm forever grateful to my coaches and teammates for teaching me these things.

However, as my birthdays accumulated and middle age approached, my knees got creakier and I thought it might be time for me to hang up my high tops and stop playing. Basketball was surely a game for the young. That notion was shattered when I met a team of amazing women at my local YMCA in Raleigh, N.C. These seven women are all in their 70s, and they've been playing basketball together for the last 19 years. They've named their team "The Fabulous 70s," which alone

tells you what they think about aging.

The team competes in Senior Games tournaments around the country and have been quite successful, winning medals too numerous to count, including a national championship.

These women didn't have the same opportunities in their youth that I was given. They each got to play in high school, but girls weren't allowed to play by the same rules as the boys back then. It was six-on-six with three on offense and three on defense. They weren't even allowed to cross half-court. After high school, there were no college scholarships or teams, no chance to keep playing. This doesn't mean that they love basketball any less. They are fiercely competitive. After so many years together, their team has become a family and a support system as they deal with the problems that come with aging.



We don't stop playing because we grow old.
We grow old because we stop playing.

Sarah, 74, only played defense in high school, but is now a scoring machine. She admits that she doesn't always feel like playing some days, but she knows there's a tournament coming up and the team needs her, so she comes to practice anyway.

She says, "Once you're on the court, you forget about the aches and pains." And afterward she's glad she came and feels better.

Judy, 77, is the team's 3-point shooter. When she was battling breast cancer, she scheduled her chemotherapy so she would be at her best for the state tournament. That was her primary concern.

Shirley, 76, has a congenital heart problem that flares up sometimes, but it doesn't stop her. She stubbornly stays in



the game, making perfect passes, until she starts to see stars. When Shirley lost her husband, nothing was the same — except that she came to practice every week and she still had her teammates.

Wanda, 77, wears a compression

sleeve on her left arm to fight lymphedema, a result of breast cancer surgery. When she joined the team a few years ago, she couldn't even get the ball up to the basket. Now she shoots lay-ups with perfect form. Never too late. Never too old.

In my recently released documentary film titled "Granny's Got Game," I've captured the inspiring stories of all of the Fabulous 70s. The film follows the team over a 12-month season, culminating in a nearly disastrous trip to the National Senior Games Championship in Houston. In the end, the team must decide what is more important: winning or friendship.

To read more about the film and find out how you can see it, visit our website www.grannysgotgame.com.