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WISCONSIN MEN'S BASKETBALL

Former Wisconsin men's basketball guard blends fashion, basketball for professional future

Michael McCleary | Wisconsin State Journal

May 12, 2025

Faisal Abdu'Allah clearly hadn't warned *everyone* about the guest he had attending his May 7 class at Warner Park Community Recreation Center.

Crowd sizes fall for Wisconsin men's basketball home games in 2024-25

A renowned British artist and professor of printmaking at the University of Wisconsin, Abdu'Allah has run the eight-week course for area youth as a dual purpose for the \$5 million **Warner Park Community Recreation Center expansion project**.

As part of the city's Percent for Art Ordinance, \$50,000 was allocated for a public art that Abdu'Allah was tabbed to design. Amy Scanlon, the project manager for the expansion, and Madison arts administrator Karin Wolf also supervised the class, which serves as both a immersive experience for students on the artistic process as well as a creative muse for Abdu'Allah in manufacturing the final piece.

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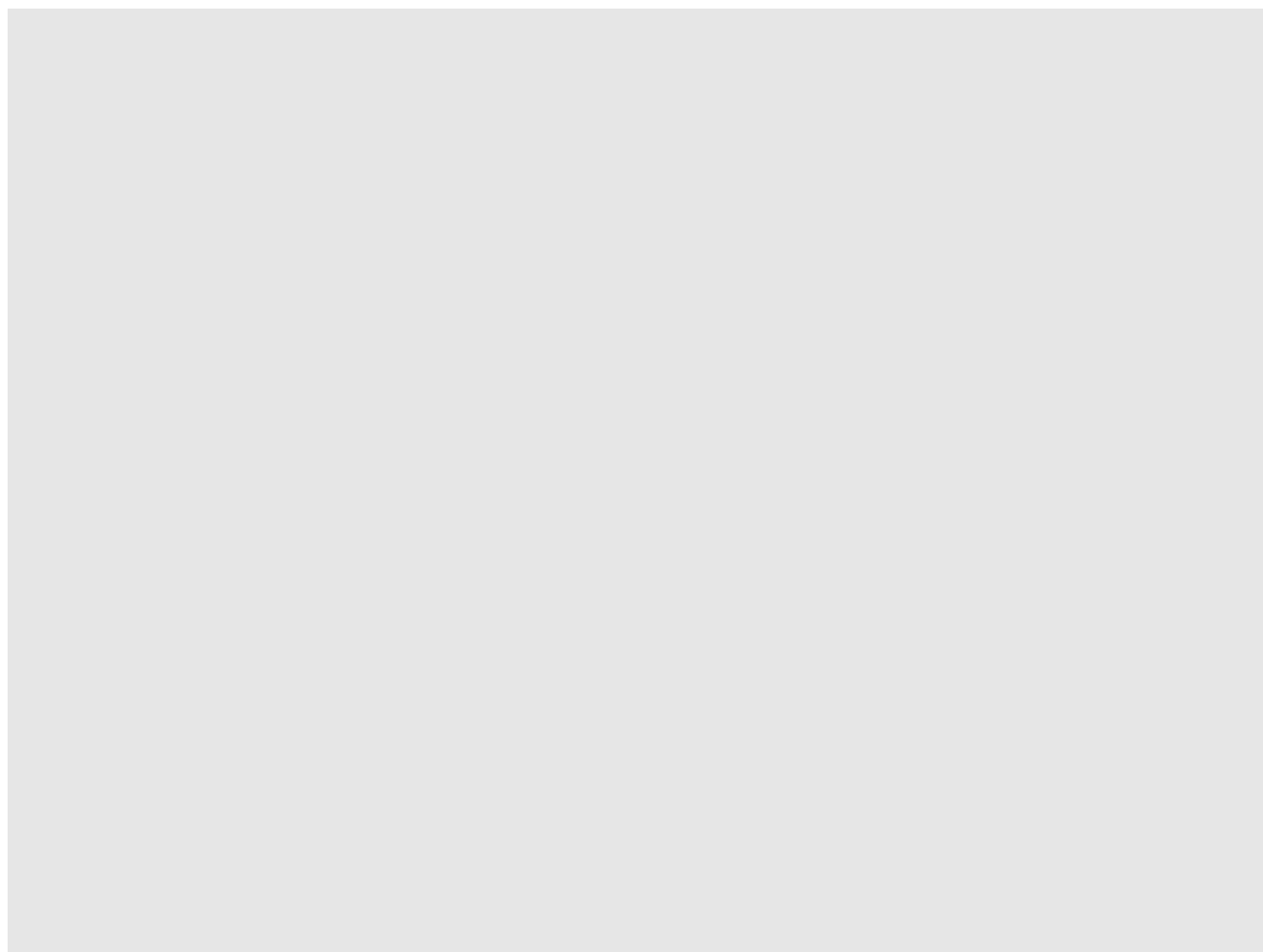
The fifth class, like each one before, began with a meal. The students focused on their plates of mac and cheese, chicken wings, cheese cubes and other finger foods while Scanlon noted the slightly-doctored versions of the portraits they took in their photography lesson the previous week. There was little indication the day would have anything to do with basketball.

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So when former Badgers guard Kamari McGee walked into the room, hardly anyone seemed to notice.

"Hold up!" yelled a student on the right side of the room, breaking the silence, then continued without hesitation. "I could beat you in one-on-one."

"Think so?" McGee replied, smiling.



Former Wisconsin men's basketball player Kamari McGee, left, answers questions from students in an art class at the Warner Park Community Recreation Center on Wednesday. McGee was invited by Wisconsin professor Faisal Abdu'Allah, right, to speak to the class about his interest in fashion and music.

Michael McCleary | Wisconsin State Journal

But McGee wasn't there to talk about basketball ... Well, the class did break for a 20-minute hoops session after McGee gave a presentation, but basketball and he are invariably linked — and that's sort of the point. Following **a breakout senior**

season in which he emerged as one of the Big Ten's best sixth men, McGee has communicated with agents the past few weeks hoping to play professionally overseas.

Basketball, he explained to the students, was all he put his mind to when he was younger. But since meeting Abdu'Allah, he's learned to not simply be "one-track minded."

Fashion, and the "Karpe Diem" brand he's been quietly building in conjunction with his basketball career, has become every bit as much a passion. And wherever he plays basketball next, he expects that to be part of his long-term future.

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"The ball stops bouncing eventually," McGee said following the class. "Now that I'm older, I know that there's more than basketball."

The prospect of mentoring a basketball player was perhaps not something Abdu'Allah thought was in the cards for him. He was a semiprofessional soccer player in his youth, knowing as well as anyone about the creative links between arts and athletics. But Abdu'Allah was surprised when he saw that a certain figure posted on Instagram about his art show at the Moka on State Street in 2022.

"That's the basketball player," Abdu'Allah remembered he exclaimed.

Wisconsin men's basketball star guard invited to NBA Draft combine

Abdu'Allah messaged McGee to thank him, and the two began chatting over social media. After getting to know each other a bit more, Abdu'Allah told McGee about a project he was working on about icons. McGee came to his studio, and Abdu'Allah led him through a photoshoot.

That led to a mentorship that continued through last summer, when Abdu'Allah guided him on the opposite side of the camera, leading a photoshoot for McGee's own brand.

It started as an internship: Abdu'Allah helped McGee build his concept, develop the brand, arranged a zoom call with a fashion designer in New York, showed him how to screen print in Wisconsin's humanities building and placed McGee's images onto clothes — just like the denim shorts he wore to his presentation with the students. All the while, Abdu'Allah helped open McGee's mind to creative thinking as he began to challenge himself from a fashion perspective in a similar way to what he had done on the court.

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"Some people view having a backup plan as as bad — like thinking that your first plan is gonna fail," McGee said. "I can still get dressed as a basketball player, so I just found something that could collide with what I really wanted to do, which was basketball. And so I would just want to keep preaching that to the kids, that you can find another plan that aligns with your first plan."

McGee's brand remains in the development phase, but he said the reason he's not in a rush to push it out is he loves the degree to which he's still continuing to learn.

"Anybody could go get T-shirts and put something on it," McGee said.

But he wants the time he's put into his brand to be obvious. He wants it to be perfect.

Wisconsin men's basketball faces difficult road tests in 2025-26 Big Ten slate

That's another reason why he's so eager to start an overseas professional basketball career. McGee, like a few of his teammates did, could've hoped for extra eligibility amid an uncertain future with the NCAA to maintain flexibility for a possible extension of their collegiate careers.

And while McGee said he thought about doing that, the window for an overseas opportunity closes fast. He didn't want to miss out, especially considering the impact a choice like that could have on both of his passions.

A journey overseas wouldn't just provide basketball opportunities but also fashion ones, perhaps even greater than that which would be available in the United States. So after graduating from Wisconsin this past weekend, McGee said that he is ready for something new.

Wisconsin men's basketball adds former Big Ten rival guard via transfer portal

But before he could make a decision on his future, McGee had to tend to a simple request from the mentor who opened his eyes to those creative opportunities — share about his experience at one of the mentor's lessons. His answer came quickly: Any day Abdu'Allah needs him, McGee's there.

There was supposed to be an art-related lesson for why the class ventured to the basketball court across from the classroom, half of which was unfinished due to the Warner Park Community Recreation Center's ongoing construction. So after shooting around and playing a game of fives, students were asked to stare at the ground and recall the colors in the gymnasium around them.

Lithuanian forward with NKL experience commits to Wisconsin men's basketball

Some students were more interested in the basketball-playing portion than others, but the scene of children running around and enjoying the recreation center's gyms showed why the project was inspired in the first place.

Scanlon noted the older patrons of the center were refreshed by the youth enjoying their time there. So they wanted youth input in the art project, which led to this course.

And McGee did his part and then some in previewing the fun.

Former Wisconsin men's basketball 4-star guard finds new transfer home

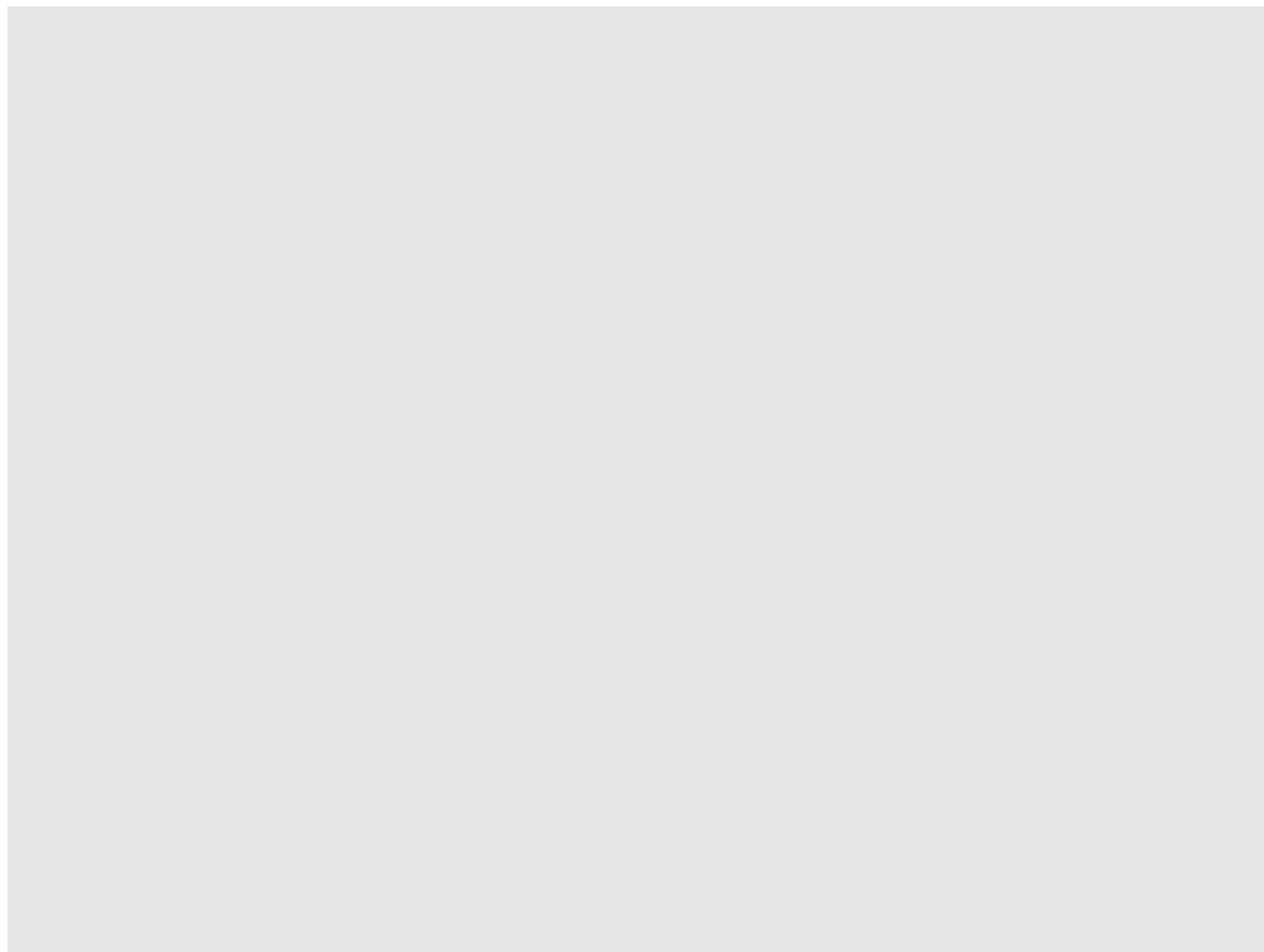
He only played at about 20% speed and passed it around, dialing it to about 40% when a few misses piled up and, seemingly, the competitive juices began to flow again.

Before leaving the court, he made an announcement.

"Everyone who was hooping, make your last shot," McGee blared. "(It's) bad luck to leave the gym on a missed shot."

And there's simply too much ahead to risk it.

Photos: Badgers men's basketball in review



Wisconsin Badgers guard Kamari McGee (4) celebrates with fans after defeating the Arizona Wildcats on Friday, Nov. 15, 2024 at Kohl Center in Madison, Wis. OWEN ZILIAK, STATE JOURNAL

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