



Stu and Courtney Boylan Douglass sip it up at Israel's Tishbi winery.

What's red and white and sipped all over Israel?

By HILLEL KUTTLER

DURING THE 2017-18 SEASON, Stu Douglass averaged 5.5 points a game and shot 50.6 percent from the field and 39.5 percent from three-point range as a backup guard for the Israeli professional basketball team Ironi Nahariya.

When not playing or practicing with the club, the Indianapolis native went about compiling some other key numbers in Israel. He and his wife, Courtney Boylan Douglass, a fellow guard whom he met when both attended the University of Michigan, visited 20 wineries, six breweries, and one distillery during their two seasons of living in Nahariya, a northern Israeli town of 65,000 along the Mediterranean coast.

They plan to continue the vine-centric tour during the basketball season that'll begin in September. Courtney will be playing for the Holon women's team, near Tel Aviv. Stu has signed with Hapoel Tel Aviv.

Their day and half-day trips, taken in leased cars the team provides under terms of Stu's contract (a standard benefit for foreign players),

have opened a window onto the Galilee, the Golan Heights, and other wine-growing regions.

"It really got me out of my comfort zone in Israel," said Courtney. "Sometimes, people get trapped in their little bubble."

The couple, both 28, weren't wine connoisseurs in 2013, when Stu left the Spanish team Planata for Hapoel Gilboa Galil, the first of four teams for which he played during his first five seasons in Israel. Stu favored beer, and Courtney didn't drink much of anything.

But while attending a friend's wedding in northern California, the Douglasses visited wineries in Napa and Sonoma Valleys.

"It piques your interest," Stu said. "We got to Israel and learned our first year that there are hundreds of wineries."

Early on, the couple kept busy seeing, not tasting, Israeli tourist spots. That changed living in Nahariya, close to so many wineries.

"With Israel, it's endless in terms of wine and food. It's become part of our routine: 'Oh, it's an off-day; let's do this,'" Stu said.

"It's daunting sometimes, but it's also part of the fun—to uncover a gem that no one visits."

The Douglasses learn on each visit by

schmoozing with the vintners about how they entered the profession, their grapes' source and variety, and their fermentation durations.

"I wish I knew more. Wine is so personalized. You might like something totally different than I like," said Courtney, who appreciates that Israeli winegrowers will "sit down and talk with you. The majority I try to go to are the smaller, family-run ones."

Both Courtney and Stu favor rosé. Their winery destinations include those nearby and further afield, boutique and behemoths, yummy and meh. After enjoying a bottle, the Douglasses might head to its source for a tour and a tasting. They've compiled recommendations from Israeli friends and teammates as well as from online recommendations.

They've visited some vineyards on multiple occasions. Tishbi, in Zichron Yaakov, isn't an imbibing favorite. Still, its Friday afternoon barbecues and live music have drawn them five times, Stu said from Indianapolis as he and Courtney drove home from separate workouts on a July morning.

"Home" might be where the heart is (the wine bottles, too), but the Douglasses don't yet have one. Each spring following the Israeli hoops season, Stu resides with his parents in Indianapolis, since his off-season trainer lives there, and Courtney stays with her folks in Minnesota, where she works at basketball camps. She also teaches basketball in Israel with an American company, PeacePlayers International, which utilizes sports to bring together children of nationalities in conflict.

Stu's time on the court in Nahariya was a mixed bag. Nahariya finished 13-19 and didn't qualify for the playoffs, after reaching the semifinals in 2016-17. His playing time also decreased dramatically.

But like any competitor worth his salt, Stu is spending the off-season working on improving his skills: ball-handling and creating his own shot. Extending one's range is key off the court, too. Come September, Stu and Courtney plan to visit vineyards in the Judean Hills and the Negev.

"I like wine, but the wine isn't the biggest reason we do it, because if I'm going to have a drink, I'm probably going to have a beer," Stu said.

"Wine is part of Israel," he said. "We're always trying to find new experiences. We kind of just go with the flow." ■

Hillel Kuttler is a freelance writer and editor living in Israel. He can be reached at hk@hilleshreibcommunications.com.