



## **Tonight We Lift the Banner in Wade County**

By: Austin Rader

February 22, 2020 — It was November of 2004. I was 6 years old at my grandparents house in Montgomery, Alabama for Thanksgiving. My dad was calling for me to get in the car. I was in the living room with my eyes glued to the TV screen. A Dwyane Wade Converse commercial was airing. I was mesmerized.

I remember everywhere I went the rest of that week. I was asking my dad all types of questions about Dwyane Wade. I wanted to know everything. It was only his second season in the NBA, but he was taking the league by storm. He led the Miami Heat to the top seed in the Eastern Conference.

My parents wouldn't let me watch the Heat host the Detroit Pistons in game seven of the 2005 Eastern Conference Finals. The game started past my bedtime. I remember waking up at 6:00 am for swim practice the next day and my dad telling me that the Heat lost in the final minute. After practice, I ran home and re-watched the game from start to finish. I was hoping my dad was wrong. The "seven year old" version of me didn't want to believe that the Heat's season was over.

When the 2005 summer ended, I moved to St. Louis, Missouri. One of my first friends at Green Trails Elementary was a huge Heat fan. We were obsessed with the Wade & Shaq duo and would watch every Heat game that was nationally televised.

I remember thinking how the Pistons were even BETTER than they were the season before. I remember being at my grandparents house in St. Louis on a Sunday afternoon and watching Wade score 17 of the Heat's final 21 points in a come-from-behind victory against Detroit, including the game-winner.

Wade went on to win the All Star game MVP as well.

The success Wade had wasn't as expected compared to the previous season. Miami got their re-match with Detroit. Miami had the "juice" in this series. The whole team came together keeping that memory of the Wallace brothers celebrating on their court the year before. This Heat team's veteran leaders came to play. Everybody played at a high level. They were on a mission.

The Heat knocked off the Pistons in six games with Wade scoring 14 points & 10 assists with the flu. He went on a 10-0 run in the 3rd quarter that all but put the game away.

He took it to another level in the Finals.

"Flash," as he became known by his fans, averaged 34.7 points per game scoring 40+ points in games 3 and 5. Down 0-2 in the series Miami was down 13 points with 6 minutes to go.

Pat Riley says Game 3 was arguably the greatest moment he had ever witnessed on a basketball court. "When we got down by 13 points with six minutes to go in the fourth quarter against Dallas and were ready to go down 3-0 [in the series], that's when the light came on for him and the rest of us got to witness what a real GOAT is," Riley said.

"We were in a timeout huddle. Dwyane simply said, 'Bleep this, I'm not going out like this.'" DWade went on to score 12 of the Heat's final 22 points in that span to finish off the comeback for Miami.

I remember sitting in my living room with my mom. Watching Dirk hit a crazy jumper over Shaq with 9 seconds left in Game 5 to put the Mavs up by one. Wade simply dribbled through 4 Dallas defenders and got fouled with a second left. He drilled both free throws and secured a Miami win that put them up 3-2 in the series.



The Heat went on to win the series in six games with Wade securing the rebound and throwing the ball into the air as the Heat hung on to win by 3 points. DWade won Finals MVP and cemented his legacy as a future hall of famer.

In the spring of 2010, my dad and I flew down to Miami to catch a Miami Heat - San Antonio Spurs game. It is still my favorite basketball game I've ever been to. Hearing the announcer yell Wade's

name for what felt like an hour in pregame introductions, to Wade jumping on the scorer's table before tip-off are unforgettable moments.

Flash was able to get to the rim at will. His acrobatic finishes mixed with his high IQ was special. I'm very fortunate I was able to see #3 play in-person during his prime.

Dwyane Wade would go on to break dozens of records but after not being able to get back in the conference finals, Wade recruited LeBron James and Chris Bosh to join forces after the 2010 season. This led to four straight NBA Finals appearances, winning two of them.



The "Heatles" as they referred themselves, were some of the most electrifying basketball teams to watch in recent memory. Wade's unselfishness and letting LeBron be the "go to player" was the secret to the team winning two championships.

I was in middle school when the "Big 3" formed in Miami. I watched every game I possibly could. Playing competitive ball myself, I would study how Miami played and

apply their moves to my own game. I still go back and watch old games and highlights of those teams.

Dwyane Wade is that athlete that I'm going to tell my kids and grandkids about. He was electric and played with class. Nobody could ever say anything bad about the guy. What he's done off the court has been just as impactful as what he's done on it. In 2003, he founded the Wade's World Foundation, which provides support to community-based organizations that promote education, health, and social



skills for children in at-risk situations.

In 2008, he purchased a new home for a south Florida woman who's nephew accidentally burned down the family home.

After the Parkland school shooting, Wade reached out to the families who lost loved ones in the tragedy. One family in particular, the Oliver family's son Joaquin, wore #3 because of Wade. So Wade put his name on his shoes and dedicated the remainder of the Heat season to Joaquin. He invited the Oliver family to the team's March 3rd home game. He presented them with custom shoes and a game-worn jersey.

Tonight his iconic #3 Heat jersey will be hung in the rafters at American Airlines Arena in Miami. He is immortalized by the Miami Heat franchise. I'll be watching.

My eyes will be glued to the TV, just like they were when I was six years old, unaware of the greatness that was about to endure.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6IMjq1chBE4>