



## **Merrick Academy Gym Renamed in Memory of Anthony Mason**

By Matt McClure  
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SPRINGFIELD GARDENS - Before Merrick Academy became a charter school, its gymnasium belonged to a neighboring church and it's where NBA all-star Anthony Mason spent his days as a teen shooting hoops. Now, the gym will bear his name. It will be called "Mason's Court."

"It means a lot," said Anthony Mason, Jr. "It shows the impact he had on this area, his impact on his neighborhood and his impact on the people in the community."

Mason grew up in Southeast Queens and graduated from Springfield Gardens High School. He signed with the New York Knicks in 1991, and played with the team for five seasons. Mason died of congestive heart failure in February. He was 48 years old.

In a ceremony Wednesday, administrators at Merrick Academy dedicated the gym in his honor.

Mason's sons -- Anthony Junior and Antoine -- say their father would be honored to know the community he loved so much is remembering him in this way.

"He'd have a big Kool-Aid smile right now," said Mason's other son, Antoine. "He loved the kids. He always came back and always gave back to people."

"When you do things like this and show the love the community has for him, it's an inspiration," Anthony Mason, Jr. added. "It's a motivation for these kids to look back and look at this court, look at this name and be like 'that can be me!'"

That's why school officials say they hope the dedication will empower students for years to come. "It's important for these children to know that he played on this court," said Gerald Karikari, the Board Chairman of Merrick Academy. "It's important they know he came from this community. And so, no matter what anyone else tells you, if he could do it, anybody can do it."

The Mason brothers plan to further their father's legacy by launching a foundation also in his name. They want to reach out to young people across the country through basketball; teaching them the importance of staying active and staying in school.

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