



FROM LEFT: Chris Webber as Preacher, Nate Robinson as Boots, Lisa Leslie as Betty Lou, Shaquille O'Neal as Big Fella, Lil Rel Howery as Dax, Kyrie Irving as Uncle Drew and Reggie Miller as Lights

TEAM BUILDING

by Chris Koseluk

The comedy *Uncle Drew* just might have the most unique game plan of any summer film. Starring Lil Rel Howery as Dax, a hapless basketball coach still having nightmares about losing the big game back in high school, *Uncle Drew* needed a team of septuagenarians to hit the basketball court and play like NBA superstars. The plan was to draft real-life pros and make them look decades older.

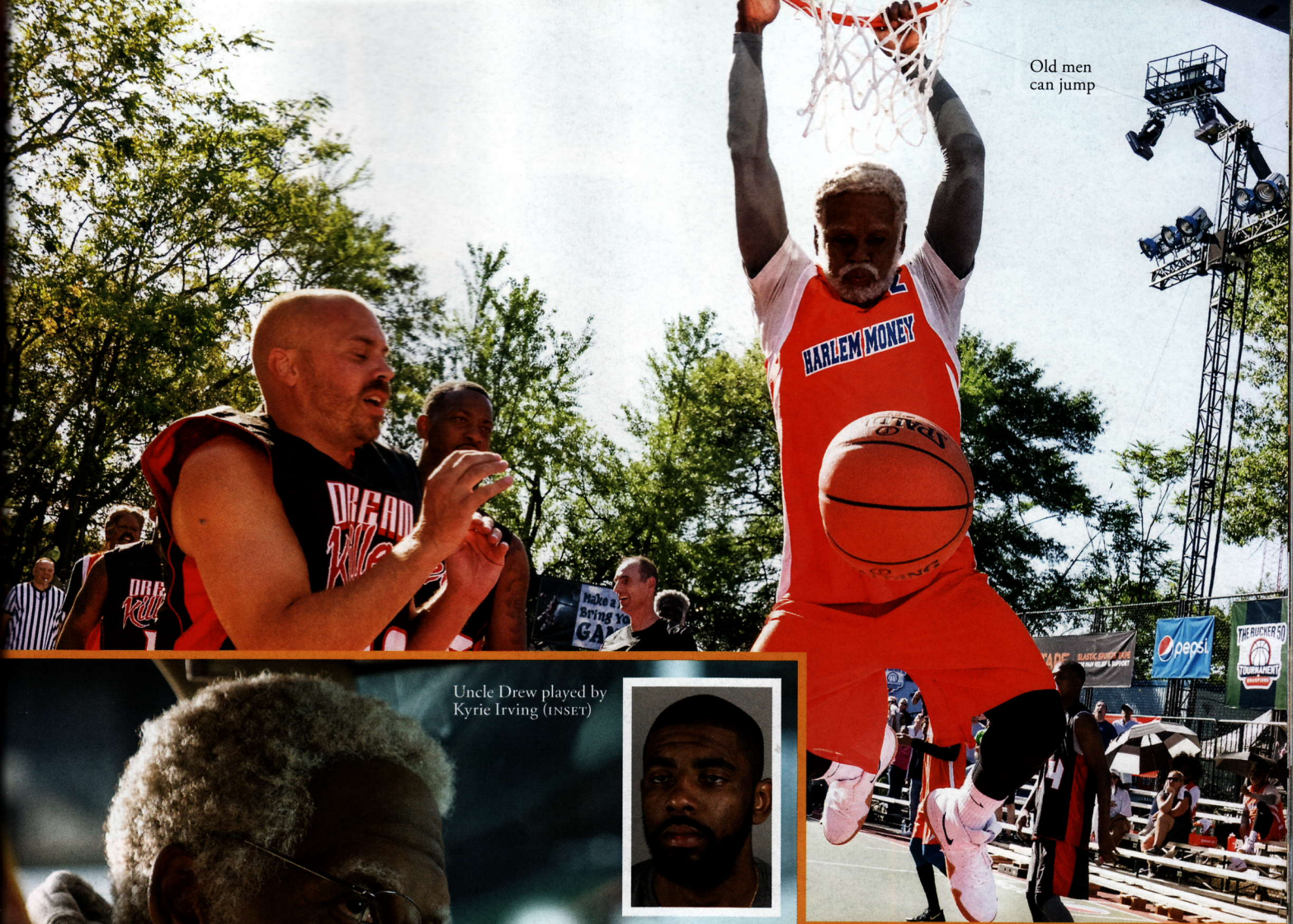
The title character was already in place. Kyrie Irving, the Boston

Celtics' superstar point guard, was first transformed into the gray-haired Uncle Drew back in 2012 for a series of Pepsi Max viral videos. He'd hit a neighborhood playground looking like an old man—and then dribble circles around his “much younger” opponents.

NBA greats Shaquille O'Neal, Reggie Miller, Chris Webber and Nate Robinson and WNBA legend Lisa Leslie were recruited to round out the squad that Uncle Drew reunites.

To make it all work, the producers needed an all-star make-up performance. That's where Blue Whale Studios came in. Its creative crew, lead by Jonah Levy and Matt Silva, pulled off some of their best moves to make the players look like they were better suited for the bingo hall than the basketball court.

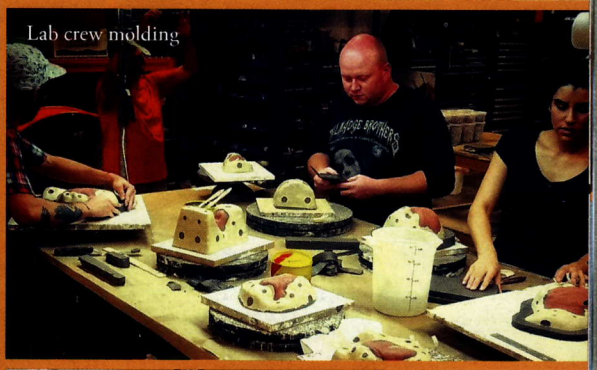
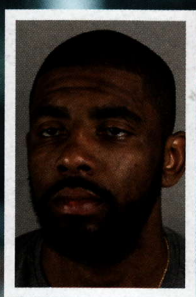
“Our aim was to make them look like they were in their late 60s to early 80s,” says Levy, who relocated the Blue Whale Orlando, Florida shop to Atlanta in 2016 and partnered with



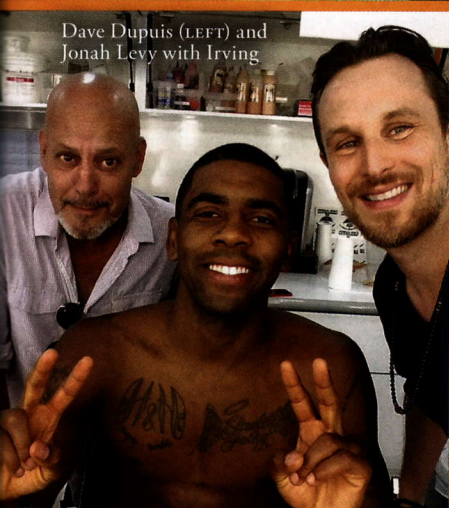
Old men can jump



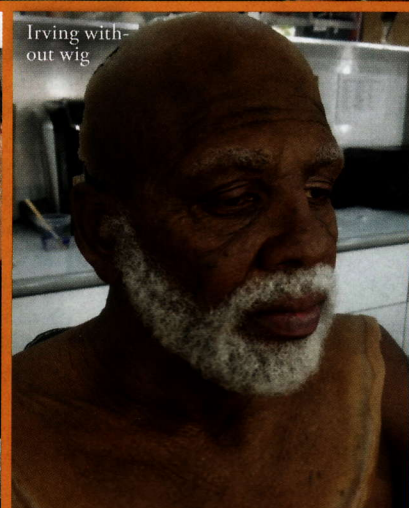
Uncle Drew played by Kyrie Irving (INSET)



Lab crew molding



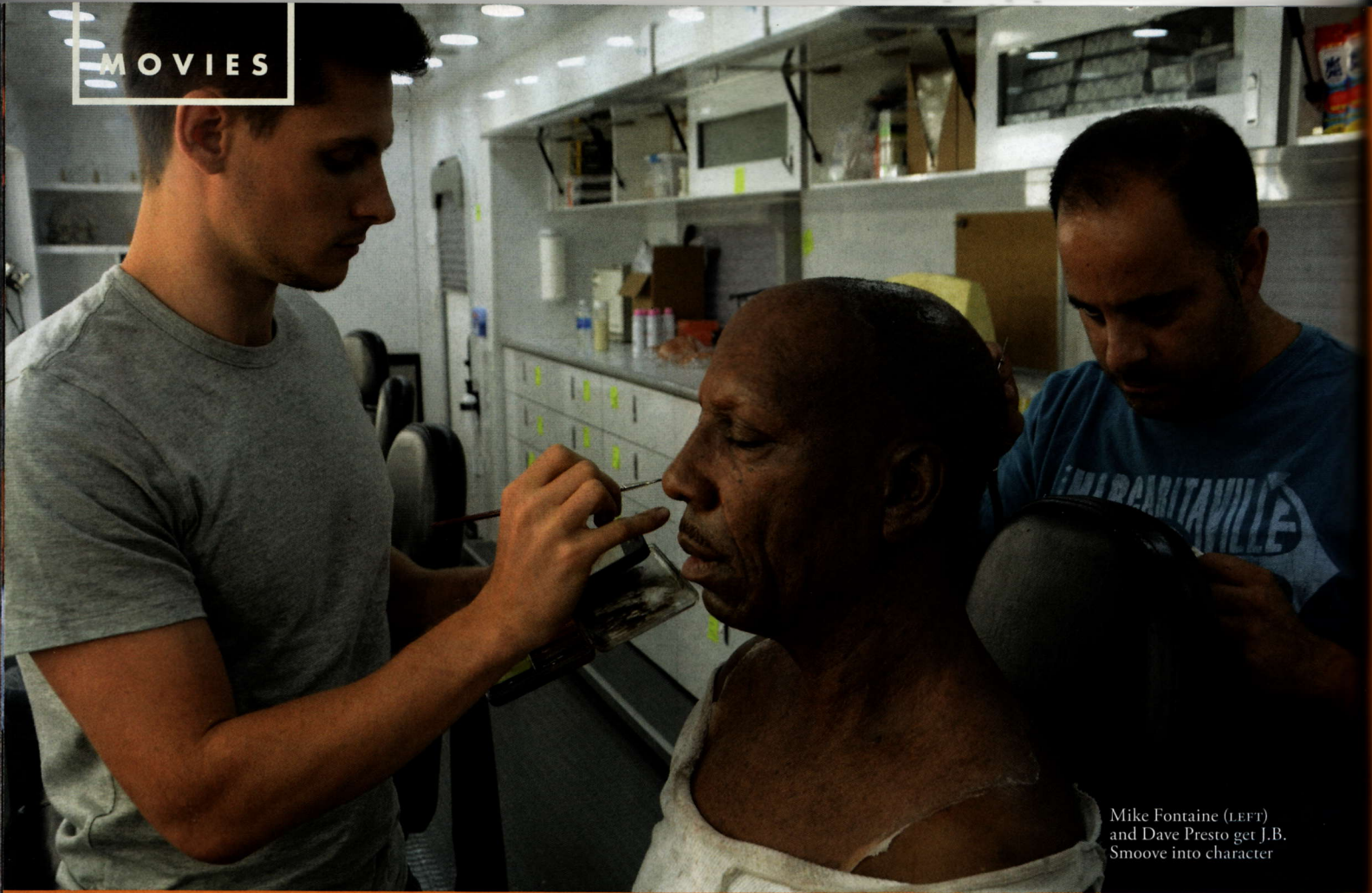
Dave Dupuis (LEFT) and Jonah Levy with Irving



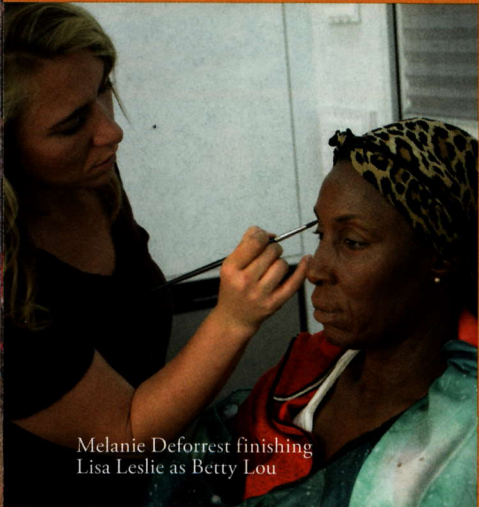
Irving with-out wig



Finished Uncle Drew make-up



Mike Fontaine (LEFT) and Dave Presto get J.B. Smoove into character



Melanie Deforest finishing Lisa Leslie as Betty Lou



Lisa Leslie (INSET) as Betty Lou



Reggie Miller (INSET) as Lights

Silva. “Each make-up was approached not only from an aesthetic standpoint, but also from a practical standpoint.”

“The challenge was deciding how extreme to go, knowing that every character would be in make-up every day of the shoot,” adds Silva. “Things like having to withstand the heat, humidity and sweat over a 12-hour day, while playing basketball in the Atlanta summer, determined the final age and look.”

Blue Whale Studios jumped at the chance to take on the challenge when approached by producers Marty Bowen and John Fischer. “This project was a dream come true for us,” continues Silva. “To be able to create seven full characters and have them in make-up the entire time just doesn’t happen that often anymore.”

Make-up artist Ed French had originally created Irving’s make-up for the ad campaign. Blue Whale was determined to stay true to his overall design while adding some new updates and their unique touch for the big screen.

Another priority was capturing the spirit of the comedy. Blue Whale strove to find the funny in such touches as Miller’s custom-made gold tooth and O’Neal’s Big Fella zen martial arts look. “We knew there was just no way to hide Shaq,” says

Levy. “We thought it would be great to put him in the classic Bruce Lee yellow and black uniform as a throwback to the amazing martial arts films, and create a fun and unique hairstyle design.”

“Our goal was to create memorable characters, rather than strictly accurate old-age make-ups,” adds Silva. “We brought in Mike Fontaine, an incredibly talented artist and sculptor. He had a huge influence on the look.”

Initially, the major applications took almost four hours. Levy worked with Dave Dupuis to apply the 11 prosthetics that transformed Irving into Uncle Drew. Webber’s Preacher, a slam-dunk servant of the Lord, required a 14-piece application overseen by Silva and key Dave Presto. Robinson’s shock-haired Boots, famous for his foot moves, received 10 prosthetics applied by Bruce Fuller and Mark James Ross. Melanie Deforrest—assisted at various times by Levy, Silva or Richard Redlefsen—applied the 10 pieces to age Leslie.

Comedian J.B. Smoove, who plays Angelo the old-school barber who tells Dax about Uncle Drew, was also aged. His 12 pieces were applied by Fontaine and Presto.

As shooting progressed, everyone got in the zone—cutting the application times to under three hours.

Comparably, both Miller and O’Neal got off easy. They were in their chairs for under two hours. Redlefsen, along with Emily Coughlin, applied the seven pieces that turned Miller into the almost-blind sharpshooter Lights. Lee Grimes and Sarah Graham handled the five pieces needed for O’Neal.

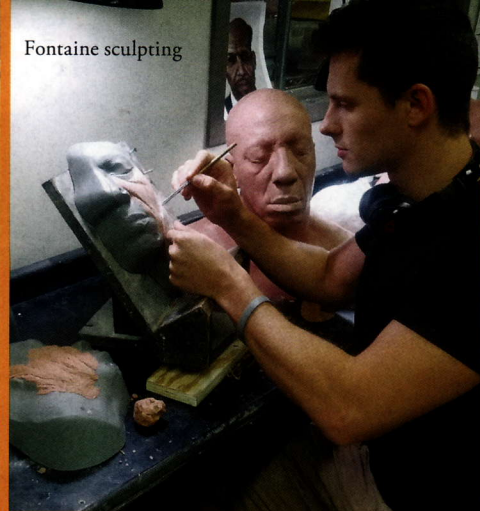
“In total, we ran almost 3,000 individual appliances over the run of the show,” says Levy. “Our prosthetic department supervisor Cass McClure, who, honestly, was one of our saving graces on this film, figured out the best way to break down each make-up to ensure it went on smoothly, but also held up to the rigorous shoot. They were some of the best pieces we have ever laid down.”

Backing up McClure was lead mold-maker Andy Fowler, prosthetics runner Scott Wallace and prosthetics techni-



Shaquille O’Neal
(INSET) as Big Fella

Fontaine sculpting



MUST-HAVE PRODUCTS

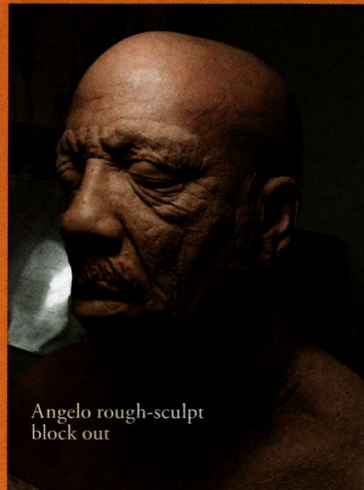
Jonah Levy

1. Skinn Cosmetics Orchid Gel: One of our favorite mattifiers for prosthetics, tattoos, etcetera. The slight purplish hue can also help to color correct and cool any tones that are too warm.

2. Metal artist painter tubes: We love to put all of our matted Pros-Aide or Beta Bond in these tubes. They prevent them from drying, are extremely easy to keep on our stations and then throw into our set bag, and the tops are very easy to clean, preventing any buildup that prevents closing.

3. The Pro Make-up Station: We were tired of packing and lugging multiple items to set up our stations, so we created our own. This all-in-one unit holds seven dram cups, contains multiple slots for storing brushes both upright and on a slanted rest, an acrylic palette (which can be engraved) and a separate powder bowl. The base is made of durable silicone, which not only makes it extremely easy to clean, but also allows it to roll up for ease of transport. This station has been indispensable for us. They can now be ordered directly from our website (fxmakeup.com).

4. Premiere Products, Inc. Skin Illustrator and Blue Whale Studios Inc. Youngblood palette: Realizing there were no companies that offered an adjuster palette for dark skin, we wanted to come up with one that had all of the colors we would need to do, so PPI was amazing at creating and filling our order with very little lead time.



Angelo rough-sculpt
block out

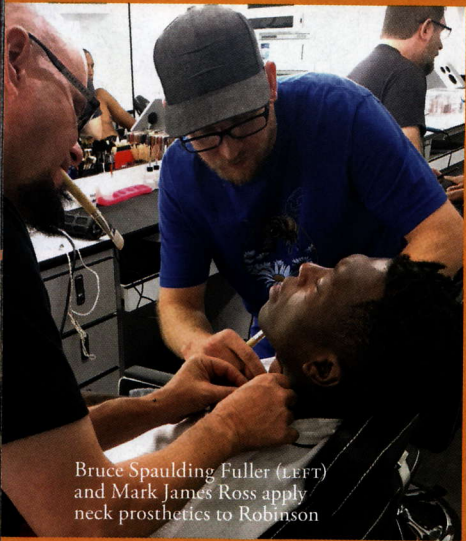


Smoove (INSET) as
Angelo





Nate Robinson (INSET) as Boots



Bruce Spaulding Fuller (LEFT) and Mark James Ross apply neck prosthetics to Robinson



Ross (LEFT) and Fuller with Robinson



On-set crew (BACK ROW, FROM LEFT) Jonah Levy, Richard Redlefsen, Lee Grimes, Matthew Silva, Jack Lazaro, Bruce Spaulding Fuller, Conor McCullagh, Mark James Ross (FRONT ROW, FROM LEFT) Melanie Deforrest, David Presto, Sarah Graham, Laura Dandridge, Roy Woolley, Emily Coughlin and Dave Dupuis

cians Forrest Hill, Jason Hodges, Michael Kaufman, Kaylee Kheene-Swisher, Christopher Silva and Andrew Valentine.

The characters also had multiple lace and hand-laid hairpieces. “Mike Ornelaz helped us organize all the builds from L.A. He assembled a fantastic team to get them done in an insane amount of time,” adds Silva.

Blue Whale credits Vincent Van Dyke with an assist. When scheduling didn’t allow Irving, Miller, Robinson or Smoove to travel to Atlanta before the shoot, VVDFX did the lifecasts in Los Angeles.

And speaking of Atlanta, shooting during the summer certainly upped the degree of difficulty—especially the outdoor court scenes.

“We crossed our fingers and held our breath,” jokes Silva. “But, in reality, knowing the conditions we would be under, we took extra care to clean the skin and pieces.”

Skin barrier products were only used around sensitive areas, like the eyes. SweatStop became a go-to tool. Levy and Silva’s favorite adhesive for gluing down silicone appliances is Telesis 5, especially under such extreme conditions. But it had its limitations.


“We created a collapsible core to generate a seamless, one-piece neck appliance for Kyrie and applied that with Skin Tite by Smooth-On,” explains Levy. “We originally tried it with Telesis, but the weight, combined with excessive sweat, caused it to pop constantly. The Skin Tite worked perfectly and held all day with very little maintenance.”

Halfway through filming, the Telesis 5 started to irritate Webber’s skin. “We switched to stronger barrier creams and used Pros-Aide to glue down his make-up,” explains Silva. “The minute he started sweating, it was an all-day battle to keep the pieces from coming up. It was a bit of a nightmare, but we pushed through it.”

The stunt doubles also needed to be aged. “We knew that we could not create new individualized sculpts. This meant running more than double the number of total prosthetics, as well as backup sets,” says Levy. “These doubles worked almost every day the principals did.”

Blue Whale hired a separate crew just for the doubles. As busy as Atlanta is these days (Thank you, Marvel!), that’s easier said than done. Conor McCullagh, Laura Dandridge, Roy Wooley, Adam Walls, Jack Lazzaro, Bryan Reynolds and Kelsey Berk were recruited for the task.

As proud as Levy and Silva are of the final result and the effort everybody gave



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—JONAH LEVY

to pull it off, if the duo had to nominate an MVP, it might just be the basketballers.

“They were incredibly respectful of us and the process,” says Levy. “There was no complaining. Everyone brought a positive energy.”

“Kyrie definitely set the tone. He was on time and ready to work each and every day,” adds Silva. “His professional and respectful attitude, we feel, trickled down to the rest of the cast.”

Though there were many memorable moments, one that sticks out is the first time the transformations took place.

“Chris Webber kept saying he looked like his grandfather,” says Silva.

“Their characters just came to life,” says Levy. “It really was like getting the ‘squad back together’ as Uncle Drew states. These are some of the best players to ever play the game. And when they came together in one room, it was electric.” **MA**



Matthew Silva (LEFT) and Dave Presto applying Chris Webber as Preacher