

Power Forward

Brett Yormark is the youngest CEO in the NBA—and when he gets the Nets to Brooklyn, he'll also be the happiest. *by Neil Patrick Stewart*

DON'T CALL HIM A CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER—call him a conqueror. At 42, Brett Yormark is the youngest CEO in the NBA, one who has quickly proven himself to be ruthlessly innovative and undeniably effective.

Since 2005 Yormark has been president and chief executive officer of Nets Sports and Entertainment, and in that short time he has completely reimagined the brand, drastically increased sponsorship sales, and brokered the most lucrative naming-rights deal in sports-arena history. On his watch, the New Jersey Nets' sponsorship revenue has gone up 300 percent, more than 100 new sponsors have signed on, and the team has had unprecedentedly high season-ticket renewals and averaged more than 2,000 new full-season tickets per year.

If all goes according to plan, by 2010 Yormark and his basketball army will have conquered Brooklyn as well. In January of 2007, the UK-based bank Barclays of London signed a \$400 million, 20-year deal to put its name on the proposed \$1 billion Barclays Center, slated to be designed by iconic architect Frank Gehry and to include world-class restaurants and concert seating. (It's an exciting time for the team itself, too—thanks to the recent acquisitions of Yi Jianlian and Keyon Dooling, things are looking better than ever.)

So what's the secret to Yormark's success? Being an early riser. His alarm goes off at 3:45 A.M. every morning, and he's working out by 4 A.M. "It clears my mind, gives me a chance to think and focus," he says. He's in the office by five. "I'm a transactional CEO," he explains. "I'm out there in the trenches each day. In order to do the managerial things, I need to get in early and set the tone."

And set the tone he does. Splitting his time each day between his office in New Jersey and the Barclays Center showroom in Midtown Manhattan, he seems to be everywhere at once, aggressively courting new business partners and sponsors with the enthusiasm of an 18-year-old.

To Yormark, that level of energy is natural. "I love what I do; I'm inspired by it," he says. "My mission is to get us to Brooklyn. The thing that drives me every day is opening night. I've met with hundreds of kids in Brooklyn, and when you mention the Brooklyn Nets, they go nuts. Brooklyn isn't just a borough of New York—it's the fourth largest city in the US. To give fans and kids a chance to be a part of something, that's what it's all about."

The borough hasn't been home to a major sports team since the Dodgers left for Los Angeles in 1958. "We're selling hope and vision," Yormark explains. "I have to be a storyteller. This isn't just about a sports team. [The center] will be a landmark. A destination."

Yormark knew his sweeping vision was taking hold when Gehry signed on to be the architect. But it was when Barclays agreed to the naming rights that he knew success was inevitable.

"They're my dream partner. That exceeded my expectations, to attract an international brand like that," he says. "Our whole story is on that scale. This is bigger than New York. This is a global story." [G]

