

Everybody Knows Bleck

By Adam C. Olson

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For Honoura “Bleck” Bonnet, basketball was everything. By age 15, Bleck was a rising star in French Polynesia—one of the best players playing for one of the best teams in the top adult division in the country. Though his nickname was a misspelling of the English word *black*, there was no mistaking his talent.

But he wanted more. He wanted to play professionally in Europe. And more than anything, he wanted to win a gold medal at the South Pacific Games.

Honoura “Bleck” and Myranda Bonnet have long been involved in basketball in Tahiti.



The only obstacle that seemed to stand in his way was the Church.

A Man on a Mission

Though the team Bleck played for at the time was Church sponsored, Bleck had little interest in the Church or the prophet’s call for every worthy and able young man to serve a mission.

He had already told his bishop he wouldn’t be going on a mission. He didn’t see how he could play professionally if he gave up two years.

What’s more, the South Pacific Games—held every four years—would take place during his mission, and the Tahiti Basketball Federation was interested in having him play for the national team. He would finally have an opportunity to put an end to those words his father said every time Bleck started thinking too highly of himself: “Everybody knows Bleck, but he doesn’t have a gold.”

Bleck’s father, Jean-Baptiste, meant those words good-naturedly. But they drove Bleck crazy. They were a reminder that even though basketball fans throughout Tahiti knew of him, he didn’t have a medal from the games. His father had won a gold medal with the men’s team during the first South Pacific Games.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ADAM C. OLSON, EXCEPT AS NOTED



Bleck's love for basketball has been both a test and a blessing.



“Happiness comes from living the way the Lord wants you to live.”

President Thomas S. Monson, “Preparation Brings Blessings,” *Liahona* and *Ensign*, May 2010, 67.

It was Bleck’s mission to put those words to rest. He didn’t have time for any other mission.

A Change of Mind, a Change of Heart

Regardless of his feelings about a mission, Bleck still participated in Church activities. At a Church dance when he was 16, Bleck mustered up the courage to ask Myranda Mariteragi to dance. Myranda was a good basketball player too—with dreams of winning her own gold medal. Her father was also on that original medal-winning team.

Seconds after he asked her, the song ended. So they danced during the next song, which turned out to be the last of the evening. By then Bleck didn’t want the dance to end.

Bleck hadn’t planned on marrying in the temple or even marrying a member for that matter. But that began to change as he got to know Myranda better over the next two years. At her home one day, something she had made in Young Women caught his attention. It read, “I will marry in the temple.”

Bleck’s interest in Myranda and her firm commitment to temple marriage were enough to make him reconsider his plans. He decided to start taking the Church seriously. His decisions led to actions that allowed the Holy Ghost to work in his life.

The Decision

One of those decisions was to prepare to receive a patriarchal blessing at age 18. When the patriarch stated in the blessing that Bleck would serve a mission and marry in the temple, he felt the Spirit. “I knew that’s what God wanted me to do,” he says.

Though the national team looked like it had a chance to medal, Bleck decided with his family’s support that he would put what God wanted ahead of what he wanted. The decision wasn’t easy. The pressure to play was great. And he quickly learned that his resolve to submit to God’s will would be tested more than once.

After he had served as a missionary in Tahiti for a year, the basketball federation asked if he could return to the team for just one month to participate in the games.

Bleck’s mission president, concerned about the effect the experience would have on Bleck’s ability to return and serve, felt inspired to tell him, “You can leave if you want, but you can’t come back.”

Bleck wanted that medal, but he no longer wanted it more than anything else. His mission had been amazing. He wasn’t willing to give up his last year, even for basketball.

Bleck stayed.

The team won gold.

Different Circumstances, Same Decision

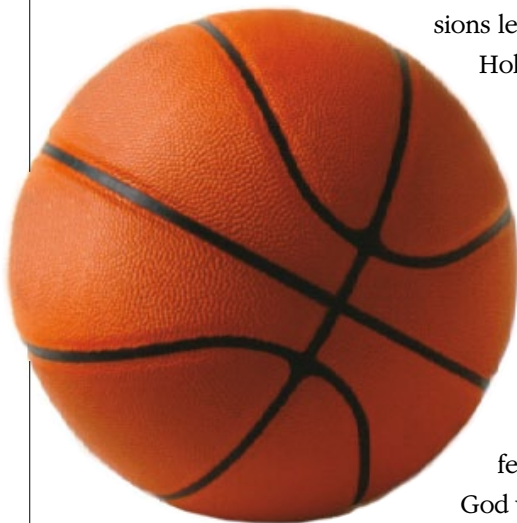
After Bleck honorably completed his mission, he married Myranda in the Papeete Tahiti Temple, and they began a family. He also resumed playing for the national team.

Myranda was playing point guard on the women’s national team and preparing for the South Pacific Games herself.

However, as the games approached, the couple began to feel strongly that they should have a second child.

With the upcoming games less than a year away, it would have been easy to put off another baby long enough for Myranda to play. The women’s team had a good chance of medaling.

But the couple had learned from experience that submitting their wills to God





brought greater blessings than anything they could hope for from following their own desires. After careful study and prayer, they decided to put their family first.

In 1999, while Myranda was eight months pregnant, the women's team won gold.

Everybody Knows Bleck

Bleck and Myranda have been able to play basketball at the highest levels in French Polynesia over the past decade—winning national league championships and tournament cups and playing for the national team during the 2003 and 2007 games.

At the 2011 games, both participated, only this time Bleck was there as coach of the men's team. While Myranda and the women's team won the gold medal, the men's team earned bronze, again falling short of Bleck's dream of gold.

Bleck sometimes wonders what his life might have been like if he had done what

he wanted instead of what God wanted.

"I'd probably have a gold medal," he says. "Maybe I would have played professionally, maybe not."

But the couple doesn't regret the decisions they've made. They're not sure how they could be happier.

"I married in the temple," Bleck says. "I have a great wife, four beautiful children, and I'm still in the Church. Basketball alone couldn't give me any of that. Those are blessings that have come as a result of putting the Lord first."

Putting the Lord first hasn't put his father's teasing to rest, but it has given those words new meaning. A few years ago when the federation considered scheduling league games on Sundays, the club presidents met to discuss it. Someone asked, "Did you ask Bleck?"

The proposal was dropped.

Because Bleck has put the Lord first, not only does everybody know Bleck—they know what he believes. ■

For Bleck and Myranda, success in their sport has taken a backseat to success in their family.