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**Derek Fisher**, a UALR graduate who plays for the Utah Jazz, greets UALR student-athletes after he introduced the Fisher Fellows Life Skills Programs at the school Wednesday night.

# Fisher: Life skills matter more than athletic ability in the end

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ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

A busy day ended with Derek Fisher passing out life lessons to UALR's student athletes.

Fisher, the former UALR point guard who will begin his 11th NBA season when training camp for the Utah Jazz opens next week, was in Little Rock Wednesday for a day that began with meetings and ended with a speech to UALR's athletic community at the Jack Stephens Center. He talked to the student athletes about everything from going to class and studying to attempting to stay out of debt.

"If you open up the dictionary for a definition of 'Respect The Game,' you'd see a picture of Derek Fisher," UALR Athletic Director Chris Peterson said as he introduced Fisher Wednesday night.

"The skills that you develop in life will carry you so much farther than any athletic skill you master," said Fisher, who played at UALR from 1992 to 1996.

He was traded from the Golden State Warriors to the Jazz in the off-season. Last spring, Fisher donated \$700,000 to UALR and the practice gymnasium at the Jack Stephens Center is named Derek Fisher Court.

After arriving late Tuesday night, Fisher's Wednesday began early with UALR's Campaign

Steering Committee.

"They have just an unbelievable plan to continue to raise major funds to help not just the athletic department but the university as a whole. It will really continue to grow this university and get it to the level we all know it deserves to be on."

Fisher did media interviews and had a meeting for the Fisher Fellows Life Skills Program, which is designed to help UALR's student athletes learn skills that will make them successful after college. It will also eventually pair student athletes with local elementary children in a mentoring program.

"For these kids now, it's a different society that we live in. It's a different world. I think if we have people in a position like myself to try to help them cope with everything they experience as a young person, hopefully this can be that vehicle," Fisher said. "I don't want to bore them with too many details about the program. But what I want to share is my experiences."

Peterson said the student athletes will learn skills such as how to tie a tie, which fork to use at a formal dinner or just how to stay out of trouble.

"Whether it's dealing with credit cards. They killed me. They offer you these credit cards and you have no idea about how the decisions you make today are

going to come back and haunt you when you turn 25 and try to buy your first place," Fisher said. "I got drafted in June of 1996. I had probably tens of thousands of dollars of debt from my first through my fourth year. Probably half of my first check, I spent paying on debt from four or five years ago. Fortunately, I could afford it. Everyone won't be able to just pay that off."

Future presentations will include a nutritionist along with former NFL tight end Keith Jackson.

An exhausted Fisher wrapped up the day mingling with the athletes.

"It was really just an action-packed day. It was all positive though," Fisher said. "[Fisher Fellows] has been in the works for some time and I'm really excited. I think the program's going to be great."