

Ellen & Vince



“The Love

It was on July 12, 2003, that NBA star Vince Carter saw an old flame at a friend's wedding and realized the embers of their long-ago relationship were still smoldering. The wedding encounter provided just the right setting for new sparks to re-ignite the glow of love, and three months later Vince asked Dr. Ellen Rucker to be his wife.

Ellen, a native of Lancaster, S.C., was a freshman and varsity cheerleader at the University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill when her friend, Christopher Levy Johnson, introduced her to Vince at a college basketball tournament. He was a high school senior in Daytona Beach, Fla., and was checking out colleges as he tried to decide which school to attend on a basketball scholarship. The two teenagers hit it off and exchanged telephone numbers.

Vince and Ellen called each other quite a bit, but their relationship remained at the “friends” stage. Mostly, Ellen says, their conversations revolved around Carolina. “But when the coaches found out we were talking on the phone, they said ‘Keep talking to him!’” Oh, did we mention that Vince is 6’6” and more than one basketball program in the country was virtually salivating at the prospect of having him play for them? Three months later the high school phenom enrolled at Chapel Hill, because, he smiles, “it felt like home.”

By that time his relationship with Ellen had turned the corner of friendship and romance, and they were now officially “dating.” But during Vince’s junior year, the NBA draft sent him to Oakland’s Golden State Warriors, with a trade to



Was Always There ...”

the Toronto Raptors coming right on the heels of the draft. Although Ellen was by his side during the drafting process, distance eventually caused a strain on their relationship and they decided to “put things on hold.”

Ellen graduated from UNC and moved to Marietta, Ga., where she enrolled in chiropractor school. Vince continued with the Toronto Raptors, where he became, arguably, one of their greatest and most popular stars. She says she “got over the heartbreak” of the broken love connection and dated other people, as did he. But they remained friendly, catching up via monthly telephone calls.

Until that serendipitous July day.

Throughout Vince and Ellen’s college dating years, Ione Rucker frequently visited her big sister at UNC. Vince’s good buddy and fellow basketball star, Antawn Jamison, met the pretty young lady, and after several years of harboring a secret crush, he professed his feelings, and he and Ione began planning their wedding. Antawn tapped Vince to be a groomsman, and Ellen



was her sister’s maid of honor. And, well ...

Friends say they knew the former couple was destined to reunite when they saw the way Ellen and Vince looked at each other during her walk down the aisle at Ione’s wedding. She had actually brought a date to the event, but throughout the church wedding, and then the reception at Charlotte’s Ballantyne Country Club, it was evident that sparks were flying between her and Vince. Exactly three months later he popped the question during her first visit to him in Toronto.

The wedding was on July 3, 2004, in Palm Beach, Fla., at the Royal Poinciana Chapel, with a reception at The Breakers. Ellen wore a shimmering ivory gown and lacy veil, and her bridesmaids were stunning in their strapless ivory dresses. Vince chose an ivory tux, with matching accessories, and his attendants’ dark attire provided a nice contrast. Wedding guests included several NBA stars and executives, as well as legendary UNC basketball coach, Dean Smith. Vince’s com-

padre and soon-to-be-brother-in-law served as best man, while Ione did the honors for her sister. Rich classical classics, such as “Ave Maria,” “Trumpet Voluntary,” and Pachelbel’s “Canon in D Major” filled the air with music.

The spectacular reception began in the posh

Mediterranean Room at The Breakers, with dinner in the elegant, pink-lit Venetian Room next



door. Décor included four inverted gold umbrellas, hung from the ceiling, and filled with huge bouquets, and hundreds of enormous white flowers throughout the lavishly appointed ballroom, where

14 tables were set for the 300+ guests. Popular musical star Brian McKnight performed, to the delight of everyone who attended. To put it all in perspective, you could say the entire affair was a true representation of Vince’s specialty – an incredible “slam dunk”!

The newlyweds later left on a one-week honeymoon in Maui, a trip that Vince had arranged as a surprise for his bride.

When asked about the inevitable jokes he has had to field, Vince jokes right back that now when he takes a beating on the court he has somebody to take care of him. “When I’m hurting now, I’ve got a chiropractor!” But then he reflects on how his feelings for Ellen stayed strong through the years. “It was time.”

And she understands exactly what he means. “We needed to grow up a bit. But when you know, you know. And the love was always there.”

