

## **Dreamin' of Elite High School Hoops** **by Ronnie Flores, GrassroosHoops.net Publisher**

*The Pangos Dream Classic has done more than honor the vision of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr...it has inspired countless players to showcase their basketball skills against the best and other similar MLK weekend events around the country.*

The original premise of the Pangos Dream Classic was to honor the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. while showcasing elite high school basketball in Southern California. Over the last 20 years, the event grew bigger and inspired much more than founder Dinos Trigonis could have ever imagined.

Trigonis organized his first MLK Challenge on January 21, 1995 at UCLA's Pauley Pavilion in a three-game slate which Inglewood, featuring Paul Pierce, and his Sentinels team taking on Peninsula High School and highlighted by a match up pitting up and coming state powers Westchester of Los Angeles and Dominguez of Compton. Since then, Pierce has developed into a future NBA Hall of Famer and those two programs have won a combined 12 CIF state titles, a testament to Trigonis' vision of showcasing professional standouts and pitting the best versus the best in high school hoops while raising awareness of King's legacy among youth.

Perhaps the best matchup in the event's history came in 1997 when Dominguez faced Crenshaw of Los Angeles, at the time the kingpin of California high school basketball on the tail end of a historic 15-year run that included eight CIF state titles. The Dominguez Dons won their first state title in 1996 and their 101-90 victory over the Cougars, in which point guard Kenny Brunner was able to consistently break Crenshaw's vaunted full-court press, stamped their arrival as a state and national power.

In the audience that day at Pauley Pavilion was eighth-grader Tyson Chandler. That game helped him make up his mind to wear a Dons' uniform. "I was sitting in the stands watching Dominguez put on a show and it just hit me. I fell in love with the way they played," Chandler said.

Over the next four years, Chandler was annually one of the many featured players on some great teams the event showcased. At that time, other events, such as the Nike Extravaganza, were created to feature top players and teams such as Chandler's Dominguez club. Chandler, who developed into the No. 2 pick of the 2001 NBA Draft, was a household name around the country by the time Dominguez faced Clovis West of Fresno at the 2001 Pangos Dream Classic.

The Pangos Dream Classic helped solidify high school basketball as part of the greater conscience of general sports fans -- and peak the interest of television producers. Today, a whole slate of high school games are on national television at made-for-TV events such as the Spalding Hoophall Classic, which takes place on MLK weekend and pits many of the nation's top teams and players against one another.

The Pangos Dream Classic's most memorable matchup, a 2003 game pitting LeBron James and his No. 1 ranked team from St. Vincent-St.Mary (Akron, Ohio) versus Mater Dei of Santa Ana, attracted over 13,000 fans (including luminaries such as Nike's Phil Knight and Grassroots hoops pioneer Sonny Vaccaro) and 150 national media members to Pauley Pavilion -- not to mention a 0.7 rating from a live ESPN2 audience. With James, the No. 1 pick in the 2003 NBA Draft, as the headliner in SV-SM's 64-58 victory over the Monarchs, that year's Pangos Dream Classic attracted the largest regular season crowd to watch a high school event in Southern California in 20 years. It was the first event ever in California, and on the West Coast, to have a game nationally televised live by a national television network. It was also the first time ever a Goodyear Blimp had flown over a live event at Pauley Pavilion.

High school basketball hit the mainstream that season and never looked back. Over the past 20 years, the Pangos Dream Classic has played a critical role in high school basketball's growing popularity and its development as a social fixture on the weekend in which we celebrate the legacy of Dr. King.

*Ronnie Flores is the Publisher and Editor of GrassrootsHoops.net. He can be reached at ronlocc1977@yahoo.com. Don't forget to follow him on Twitter: @RonMFlores*