

After spending time here, The Ball is heading to the NBA

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Snowbird Commander Maj. Robert Mitchell shoots The Ball for Noel and Angelina Andreoni's Shoot The Ball project at 15 Wing Moose Jaw on Wednesday. Shelby Parker photograph

What do an elephant named Orachi, children on Easter Island and Moose Jaw students have in common?

They've all participated in the international Shoot The Ball campaign created by Noel and Angelina Andreoni.

The couple has been travelling the world encouraging almost everyone encountered to shoot the same Spalding basketball in an effort to unite people across the globe in their love of the sport.

The Ball — and the Andreonis' trip — is supposed to represent hopes, dreams and turning the impossible into the possible.

After almost six years on the road, the Andreonis stopped in Moose Jaw, where Noel is from, to take a break.

Since arriving in September, the couple has visited every school in Moose Jaw — as well as several in the surrounding area — with the ball.

"I'll bet we had a good percentage of the population of students here shoot the ball," said Angelina. "About 90 per cent of the students at each school shot the ball when we were there."

Spalding, the official equipment sponsor for the Shoot The Ball campaign, provided each school with new basketballs.

It also gave the Andreonis a new portable basketball hoop so the campaign can travel to remote locations, such as the Grand Canyon, to continue its mission.

So far, The Ball has visited 28 countries, 50 states and nearly every province and territory in Canada.

On Wednesday, it spent the afternoon in Hangar 6 at 15 Wing Moose Jaw with the Canadian Forces Snowbirds demonstration team.

Today, it left for Victoria, where it will soon be shot by Ian Hyde-Lay, the high school coach of two-time NBA MVP Steve Nash.

From there, The Ball will embark on an NBA cities tour, making its first stop in Seattle Thursday.

The Andreonis will spend time at local schools, along with members of the Seattle Supersonics and allow both professional players and local youth to shoot the ball on the Supersonics home court after their game against the Milwaukee Bucks on Dec. 7.

"From there, we'll go to Portland, then California to spend Christmas with our family," said Angelina. "While we're there, we'll hit up the four California teams."

Although NBA players are some of the biggest celebrities to take part in the Shoot The Ball campaign, the one children enjoy hearing about most, said Angelina, is Orachi the elephant.

Orachi, a very talented pachyderm, shot The Ball on the couple's trip to Thailand.

"He slam-dunked it on his first try," said Angelina. "The photo we have (of this) always makes the students laugh when we're doing presentations."

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