Freeman team wins first place in national NBA trade competition

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Freeman students Asher Nissanoff, Cameron Dartez, John Burrows, Max Yazdian and Isaac Popper, left to right, won first place in the inaugural ASU NBA Mock Trade Deadline Competition.

A student team representing the A. B. Freeman School of Business took first-place honors in the inaugural Arizona State University NBA Mock Trade Deadline Competition. The competition, hosted by ASU's Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law, took place Nov. 2-3 in Phoenix.

In winning the competition, the Freeman team — Isaac Popper (BSM '24), Max Yazdian (BSM '24), Cameron Dartez (BSM '24), John Burrows (BSM '25), Asher Nissanoff (BSM '27) and Nic Rioja (SLA '24) — edged out peers from more than 30 other universities.

"I think Tulane and Freeman prepared us to be professional and think critically," said Popper. "Being able to work as a team successfully was crucial if we wanted to win and having so many group projects at Tulane prepared us for that."

The competition challenged student teams to take on the role of an NBA general manager and negotiate deals with teams representing other franchises. At the conclusion, the teams presented their trades along with their goals and strategies to a panel of judges comprising current and former NBA executives, including the directors of basketball operations for the Phoenix Suns, Portland Trail Blazers and Milwaukee Bucks as well as the assistant general manager of the Boston Celtics and the senior cap specialist for Klutch Sports Group, one of the NBA's largest agencies.

The Freeman team represented the Los Angeles Lakers, and they decided their biggest need was a star player to maximize LeBron James' shrinking title window. Complicating matters was the Lakers' salary cap space, which is hard capped at the First Apron. By the end of the trading period, the team was able to deal D'Angelo Russell and Rui Hachimura to the Dallas Mavericks for Kyrie Irving and two first found picks and Taurean Price and two low-value second round picks to the Houston Rockets for Tari Eason.

"The judges really enjoyed hearing about our process," Popper said. "They thought getting paid to take Kyrie Irving was a great move and that the Eason deal was tremendous value."

The Freeman team were no strangers to the sports business. Yazdian is president of the Tulane Sports Business Association, and Popper is president of the Tulane Sports Analytics Club.

"I think my Sports Analytics Club experience provided the team with familiarity of basketball analytics," said Popper, who hopes to pursue a career in sports business.

"It gave us tools to have a general understanding of how players are perceived from an analytics perspective."