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Yao Makes It Official

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by: Bill Stamps

It's official. Yao Ming — one of the most popular Houston Rockets of all time — is calling it quits. Injuries are forcing the NBA All-Star to cut his basketball career short. Many who've followed him say — the city will miss much more than the rebounds, points and blocked shots he provided each game.

Yao (translated): *"In the past half year, along with friends who were concerned about me, I've had an agonizing wait, sorting out the puzzles and questions in my heart."*

It was the announcement Rocket fans knew was inevitable. After being unable to play most of the last two seasons due to foot injuries, Yao Ming is officially retiring after eight seasons in the NBA.

He was the Rockets number one draft pick back in 2002. And his impact on the city of Houston was immediate.

Former Houston City Councilmember Gordon Quan had these thoughts:

"Well there aren't many Chinese who are playing basketball, as you can imagine, but we began finding commonality with African Americans and other groups, who could say, 'Hey, you guys have game. You can play this.' And I think he was really a great cultural ambassador for the city of Houston because of that."

Yao well liked by fans and other NBA players. You might remember this commercial he did for Visa.

Fritz Lanham works for the [Asia Society in Houston](#). He says Yao made all Asians proud, whether they were Chinese or not.

"The fact that he carried himself with so much dignity, and dealt with the pressures of celebrity, and coming here without being able to speak English all that well. You know, he handled that very well and that was a source of great pride with all people of Asian ancestry."

Gordon Quan says he could see how people began to look at Asians differently because of Yao.

"I think it brought us together as a city in subtle ways, that we didn't necessarily look at Asians as being weird or unusual, but they're just a part of Houston. Whether it be the sports scene or the political scene or business scene — they're just Houstonians."

As an immigration attorney Quan travels all over the world, and says when people hear he's from Houston, the first thing they mention is Yao.

"When I would travel to other countries, especially China, people would know Houston because of Yao. And I think it really help spread the name of Houston around the world. It wasn't just to China, but I've led trade missions to South America and Europe, and they knew Yao and they knew Houston because of that."

I asked Quan if he thinks there will be another Yao Ming. Yao is 7'6 — so maybe not as tall — but another great Chinese or Asian basketball player in the NBA.

"I'm looking for the next big thing out of China. I don't know who it is today, but with a billion people, I'm sure they can find somebody (laugh)."