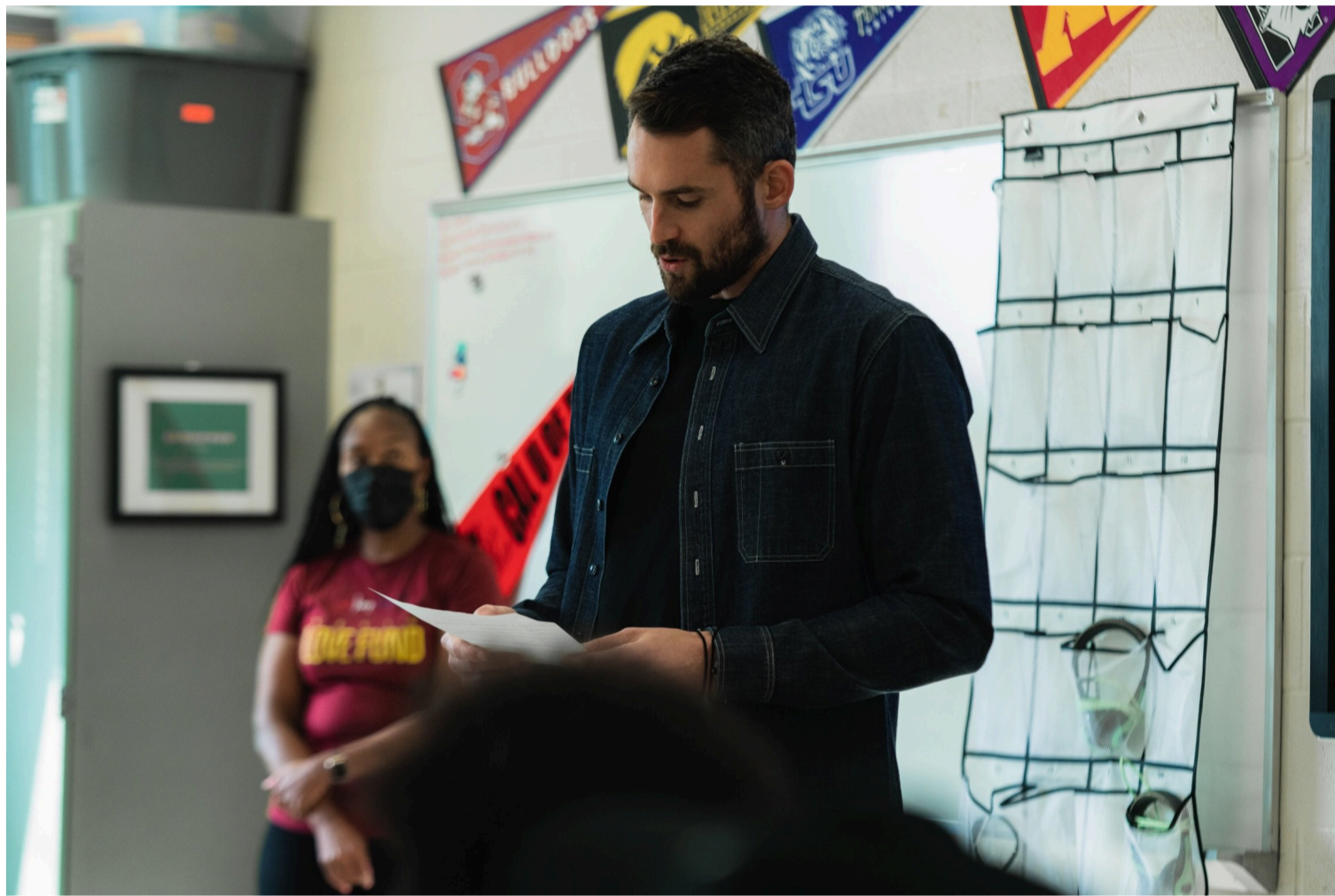


NBA Veteran Kevin Love on His Charitable Fund and Breaking the Stigma Around Mental Health

Ade Adeniji | December 20, 2023



NBA VETERAN KEVIN LOVE READS A POEM TO STUDENTS AT JUST KEEP LIVIN' - KEVIN LOVE FUND EVENT OCT 2021.

Born in Santa Monica, California, NBA veteran Kevin Love, 35, was a double-double machine during the prime of his career with the Minnesota Timberwolves and Cleveland Cavaliers, racking up five All-Star Game appearances between 2011 and 2018. He is also a 2012 Olympics gold medalist and was twice named to the All-NBA Second Team. In 2016, alongside the wizardry of LeBron James and Kyrie Irving, he won an NBA championship, taking down Stephen Curry's Golden State Warriors in a classic seven-game finals series. Not necessarily known for his defense, Love [made a pivotal stop against Curry](#) in the waning moments of the final game.

Today, the former UCLA star provides a veteran presence for my Miami Heat, who had a surprising finals run of their own last season. Oh, and fun fact: Love is the son of former Laker player Stan Love, who is the younger brother of Beach Boys singer Mike Love.

That impressive career has led to significant earnings over the years. *Forbes* named Love one of the highest-paid athletes in 2020, when he earned \$25.7 million as part of a four-year, \$120 million contract extension with the Cavaliers in 2018. Love has racked up endorsements from such brands as State Farm, Nike and Banana Republic, where he is a style ambassador and campaign model.

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While his exact net worth is unclear, Love is yet another athlete with a combination of wealth and a large platform (he has more than 6 million followers between Instagram and X), both of which can be used to impact his philanthropy. That impact happens primarily through the [Kevin Love Fund \(KLF\)](#), which he launched in 2018 to promote mental health awareness, driven in part by deeply personal forces.

I recently spoke with Kevin Love to find out more about why he decided to use his platform to speak out about his own battles with depression, why he started his mental-health-focused charity, and what he has planned down the line for the young foundation.

Opening up about mental health

From the outside looking in, everything seemed to be going fine for the Cleveland Cavaliers and Kevin Love back in the fall of 2017. The team was just a year removed from winning a championship, and would make another finals appearance after rolling through the Eastern Conference again. On November 7, Love conjured up a vintage 32 points and 16 rebound performance as the Cavaliers prevailed against the Milwaukee Bucks.

But just two days prior, while playing the Atlanta Hawks, Love felt himself struggling to catch his breath, his head spinning and his heart racing. He eventually went the locker room mid-game and was sent to Cleveland Clinic, where he underwent a barrage of tests. The diagnosis: a panic attack.

The following March, Love went public about the whole ordeal, [penning a powerful piece in the Player's Tribune](#), which publishes first-person accounts from athletes, about his battles with depression and his mental health.

“I think for me, it was wanting to tell my own story,” Kevin Love began in our interview. “During that time, there was a lot of conversation. People just outside of my circle, or within my team, or the NBA kind of got wind of things I was going through as well as the panic attack and where my mental health was at the time.” Love points to fellow All-Star DeMar DeRozan, who was also starting to speak out about his own depression, as one inspiration that led him to share his story.

“I felt like I have a story to tell and wanted to take ownership in it,” Love said. Once the piece hit, he was encouraged by the “outpouring of support” he received, both from within the NBA community and beyond. Love started seriously thinking what he could do beyond just putting pen to paper. His next step was to reach out to others in the space, including actor Matthew McConaughey and his [just keep livin Foundation](#), as well as his alma mater UCLA. The two institutions remain longstanding partners.

In September 2018, Love formally established the Kevin Love Fund with a mission to “inspire people to live their healthiest lives while providing tools for both mental and physical health.” The foundation uses education, research, grantmaking and advocacy to break the stigma around mental health.

“The sweet spot”

Coming out of the gates, Love meant to figure out exactly who he wanted to impact through his philanthropy. He remembers back when he was a teen and all the different kinds of stress he was dealing with.

“People always ask me, what would you tell your younger self? What could you [have] when you really started feeling these anxieties, and you’re feeling these bouts of me and even further than that, depression?” Love said.

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Out of this, KLF established a unique social emotional learning (SEL) curriculum for teenagers, which is now being taught to over 30,000 students in more than 500 schools across 36 states. The 14-lesson-plan curriculum is customized for middle school, high school and college students. Love calls this demographic the foundation's "sweet spot," as he looks to impact the next generation in a major way. The curriculum includes video clips from celebrities and artists like U.K. poet Hussain Manawer, actor Bryan Cranston, NBA veteran Chris Paul, and Love himself.

In doing its work, KLF taps scientific advisors such as Gowri Aragam, who cofounded Stanford Brainstorm, the world's first academic lab dedicated to mental health innovation and entrepreneurship; psychologist Nina Vasan, author of "Do Good Well"; and Michelle Craske, Kevin Love Fund Centennial Chair.

In 2020, KLF made a matching pledge of \$500,000 alongside UCLA to establish the Kevin Love Fund Centennial Chair in UCLA's psychology department, which taps clinical psychologists, social workers, administrators, educators and others to develop personalized mental health treatments.

"Being able to personalize treatments for anxiety and depression and endowing the UCLA chair and working with people like Dr. Craske has been really eye opening. Really amazing. And I feel like even after basketball, this is something that certainly lives for a long time," Love said.

Apart from this big gift, other early partners include College Track, Social Emotional Learning Alliance, The Soul Focused Group, and Bring Change to Mind, created to end the stigma and discrimination around mental health by empowering young people in high school and college. KLF has also aligned with mindfulness app Headspace, providing student athletes at UCLA with subscriptions to incorporate meditation into their training regimens.

According to a foundation spokesperson, Love has underwritten 100% of the administration costs since launch, which allows them to fundraise to scale their programs. Historically, the majority of donations have come from individual donors, foundations and corporations. Down the line, KLF is exploring what an annual fundraising event might look like.

Athlete peers and looking ahead

Though Love is used to playing a leading role on the court, he's happy to have built a team to do this work. In addition to scientific advisers, KLF also sports a small staff, including Executive Director Regina Miller, a philanthropic adviser who works for high-profile individuals in the entertainment industry as well as athletes. Then there's KLF's 12-member youth advisory committee. "I always feel like everyone is my superior and I can learn from them," Love said.

Looking to his athlete peers, Love said they are able to leverage the social platforms they've built due to the global expansion and popularity of basketball. Nowadays, athletes are able to press send on a PSA about mental health, education or voting and very quickly bring these issues in front of hundreds of millions of fans around the world.

"That's incredibly powerful. But to be in a league where they not only have your back, but are a driving force is something I'm incredibly proud of, and I think has come a long way since I came into the league in 2008."

We've previously covered the work of the [NBA Foundation](#), which pledged \$300 million over 10 years focused on driving economic opportunity and empowerment in the Black

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community — with a particular focus on job readiness, skills training, job placement and career advancement for Black youth ages 14 to 24.

As far as his particular lane, mental health, Love thinks we will see more players in the NBA gravitating toward this space in the future. He mentions education and voting rights as other top interests of his athlete peers, shouting out his long-time running mate [LeBron James and his work at I Promise School](#) in Ohio. And his philanthropic connection with LeBron remains, even after the two parted ways as Cavalier teammates.

“Seeing that right down the road in Akron was really something to witness. And now we’ve been able to have conversations and work with them, as well. When you play with somebody, obviously that’s different. But when you’re able to work [together] again and give people a sense of hope about something bigger than yourself, it just comes full circle in a way that is really special,” Love said.

Looking ahead, Love’s biggest hope is to continue to expand his work. In 2023, KLF held the second iteration of its Summer Internship Fellowship, which engages in the same work to destigmatize anxiety and depression that happens during the school year. Love wants to expand his foundation’s work globally, mentioning that programming has been translated into French and Spanish.

“We just want to make sure we’re empowering the youth, right? We want to let them speak their truth and we want them to give them the resources and tools that they need to move forward,” Love said.

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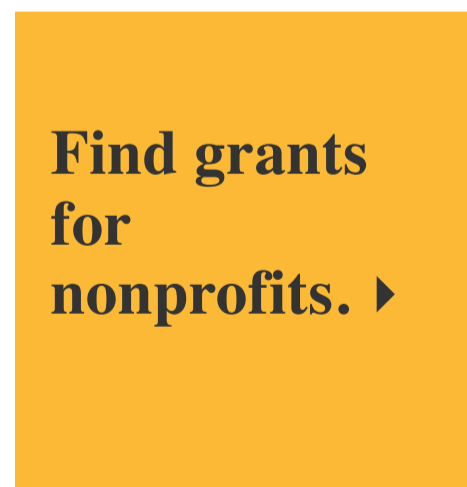
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