

NBA veteran Metta World Peace to Gilas: Run & gun

Written by Joaquin Henson
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Metta World Peace (right) and son Jeron Artest.

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MANILA — NBA veteran Metta World Peace, previously known as Ron Artest, didn't seem worried for Gilas that the Philippines will be up against tough opponents at the FIBA World Cup in China on Aug. 31-Sept. 15 and said the other day anything can happen in a game if you play solid basketball.

The Philippines, ranked No. 31 in the world by FIBA, takes on No. 4 Serbia, No. 13 Italy and No. 39 Angola in the first round of eliminations in Foshan.

The expectation is Serbia and Italy will show up with NBA players.

Gilas will suit up its own NBA player Andray Blatche, a naturalized Filipino.

"Transition defense will be key," said Metta who played for six teams in 17 NBA seasons until 2016-17.

"Don't get caught in 5-on-4 or 5-on-3 situations. I know the Philippines can play. My advice is to run and gun. I like the smalls attacking the rim. Take the open shot, move the ball, set multiple screens, use your quickness. Every team has a chance to win if you play solid, just stick to your defensive fundamentals, never reach in or stab, hold your ground."

Metta, 39, said he's considering a trip to China to watch the World Cup.

He once played in the Chinese league.

"It was a lot of fun playing in China where I have my most fans," he said.

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“You’re expected to score 40 a game and you actually can. I enjoyed my time in China and maybe, I’ll go over and watch the World Cup.”

Metta was recently in town to witness his son Jeron Artest play in the NBTC.

He even got to coach his son’s team.

It was Metta’s second visit to Manila.

Metta came for a brief stop from China in 2017.

Since Jeron’s mother is Filipina and he has lots of Filipino friends, Metta said he’s like a Filipino.

He loves Filipino food and considers WBA welterweight champion Sen. Manny Pacquiao a soulmate.

Last Friday, Metta and Jeron visited Pacquiao in his Dasmariñas Village home.

And they were Pacquiao’s guests during a boxing event at Resorts World Manila last Saturday night.

“I’ve visited Manny in his home in L.A., once spent Christmas with him and his family, was at his press conference with (Miguel) Cotto and watched him fight (Juan Manuel) Marquez,” he said.

“We keep bumping into each other. Once, I was walking by a jewelry store in L.A. and he was there so I dropped in to say hi. Through all the years I’ve known him, he hasn’t changed, still

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humble, still respectful. He's an amazing guy. At 40, he can still fight. I watched his fight against (Adrien) Broner on TV and I thought Broner was at his best but he just couldn't beat Manny. I know Manny wants to fight (Floyd) Mayweather again. I'm not sure if Mayweather will do it. Manny could fight (Keith) Thurman or (Shawn) Porter next and he'll win. He's that good."

Metta said he couldn't rate which was more important — receiving the Defensive Player of the Year award in 2004 or winning a championship ring with the Los Angeles Lakers in 2010.

"I honestly believe my NBA career was incomplete," he said.

"I could've been the MVP if I stayed at Indiana. I was averaging 24 points a game, I was Indiana's go-to guy. I was an All-Star. I could've won a lot more awards and championships. But things happen. I led the NBA in flagrant fouls, suspensions and technicals. I still wonder what could've been. Right now, I'm no longer motivated to play. I played in the Big 3 tournament last year, made my first attempt for a four-point shot but I'm nearing 40."

Metta said he's blessed that his sons Ron III and Jeron are playing the game he loves.

Ron III, 19, is a freshman at Cal State Northridge while Jeron, 18, is on his last year at Bella Vista K-12 private school in Scottsdale, Arizona.

Jeron was in Manila for a visit in 2015 and has since grown from 5-7 to 6-3.

"He could grow a little more," said Metta whose favorite Filipino dessert is *halo-halo*.

"I was 19 when I grew another half-inch. I'm 6-5 3/4. Jeron could always shoot but he's greatly improved his defense. That's the foundation."