



DIMEDROP

(HIGH)TOP CHEF

Food expert, model and NBA fan **Padma Lakshmi** speaks on in-arena cuisine and the League's future in India.

Padma Lakshmi will tell you without hesitation who her favorite NBA team is—and it's not necessarily who you'd expect. Even though she attended Clark University, located outside of Boston, the Celtics aren't the team that has her heart. No, due to her constant presence in New York, it's the Knicks who have Lakshmi yelling at her TV and attending as many games as her hectic schedule allows. In addition to her role as host of Bravo's popular *Top Chef* television show, Lakshmi has written a pair of cookbooks, occasionally stars in commercials, makes guest appearances on other shows and runs her own popular jewelry line.

While attending NFL defensive lineman Justin Tuck's annual R.U.S.H. for Literacy billiards tournament in New York City, Lakshmi spoke with us about one of her favorite NBA players (Nate Robinson), basketball in her native India and what kind of food she would serve at an NBA game.

SLAM: Do you still talk to Nate?

PL: I never really talked to him; I would yell at him from my seat [laughs].

SLAM: What would you yell?

PL: I just love watching him on the court because he's so low to the ground. He's very fast. He doesn't share the ball a lot. [Laughs] He's not a sharer.

SLAM: Did you play basketball when you were a kid?

PL: I did, but in a very lame way. I wouldn't consider myself a basketball player. It's not my forte.

SLAM: The NBA has made a big push into India. What do you think of that?

PL: You know, basketball is very big in India, even though you wouldn't think of India as a basketball country. It's a huge sport at the high school level. People are really passionate about it, and now there is a basketball league that IMG has bought. They are starting to really develop that in the young, teenage range. I think it's going to be huge in the next 20 years.

SLAM: Yeah, NBA India thinks basketball will become the country's second most popular sport within the next five years.

PL: Oh, yeah. It's much cheaper to play than other sports.

SLAM: When you go to NBA games, do you judge food at concession stands?

PL: I try not to. But I'm an omnivore; I love to eat all kinds of foods. I love going and getting a hot dog at Madison Square Garden. Although the buns get soggy in the foil paper. It's really just awful.

SLAM: I know if you go to a Yankees game, for instance, you'll see people in the box seats eating crab legs or lobster tails.

PL: Yeah, I don't know...the thing that annoys me is you have this whole box of food. If you do lobster, you want to do a lobster roll—something portable that you can pick up. You don't want to deal with a knife and fork.

SLAM: So what food would you serve if you could cater an NBA game?

PL: You know, I've often thought about this late at night when I can't go to sleep [laughs]. I would do meatball sandwiches, like Vietnamese grilled pork meatball sandwiches with basil and pickled jalapenos. That would be really good. Then I would do sweet potato fries that are chili-dusted.—**KYLE STACK**