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Former North Carolina basketball standout Ademola Okulaja dies at 46



Jason Owens

Tue, May 17, 2022, 2:57 PM



Ademola Okulaja is dead at 46 years old. (Getty Images)

Former North Carolina basketball standout Ademola Okulaja has died at 46 years old.

UNC [confirmed his death on Tuesday](#). A cause of death was not reported.

"Our thoughts and condolences are with his family, friends and teammates, the UNC statement reads.

Okulaja made Final Fours with Vince Carter, Antawn Jamison

Okulaja joined UNC as a freshman in 1995 in a recruiting class that included Vince Carter and Antawn Jamison. A 6-9 forward, Okulaja started in 112 of the 139 games he played in and helped lead North Carolina to two Final Fours, including the last of head coach Dean Smith's career in 1997. He averaged 12.0 points, 3.4 rebounds, 2.4 assists and 1.4

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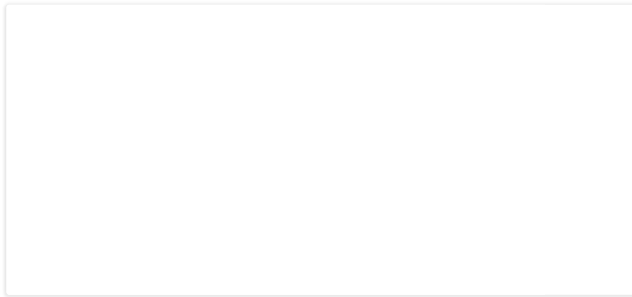
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Carter paid tribute to his friend on social media Tuesday alongside photos of himself, Okulaja and Jamison.

wvoiverines wire



This is so painful...we're going to miss you my boy. RIP @Oak1713 🙏🕊️ I'm praying for your kids and family. Without a doubt you have touched the lives of many with your kindness. 1 thing for sure you will not be forgotten....

Love you Oak

[#3MusketeersForever](#) pic.twitter.com/3m2Y52RHwi

— Vince Carter (@mrvincecarter15) [May 17, 2022](#)

Okulaga won a bronze medal with Dirk Nowitzki

Okulaga was born in Nigeria and moved to Germany with his family at three years old. He grew up and graduated high school in West Berlin before enrolling at UNC. After college, he played professionally in Europe from 1999-2009. He played for Germany in two FIBA World Cup tournaments and [won a bronze medal alongside Dirk Nowitzki in 2002](#).

Doctors found a cancerous tumor on his spine in 2008, which eventually led to the end of his basketball career.

"It was not a nice time, but I think my basketball mindset helped me in a lot of ways, by teaching me to not put my head in the sand and say, 'Why me?'" [Okulaga told UNC](#) for a profile in 2014.

Okulaja earned a master's degree in sports marketing while his cancer was in remission and eventually ran

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His former teammate at UNC Shammond Williams spoke about Okulaja with the Raleigh News & Observer on Tuesday.

"He was just an outstanding person," [Williams said](#).

"He's a person that you want to go to war with, just a selfless individual who sacrificed his game for the greater good of the team."

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