

## Former Sonic Lewis has charity, but no clear focus

By Greg Bishop  
*Seattle Times staff reporter*



MARK HARRISON / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Ex-Sonic Rashard Lewis is unsure of his charity's precise goal. "It will be a lot bigger and better and stronger foundation," he says.

Rashard Lewis made a mental checklist of goals when he entered the NBA as a Sonic in 1998.

- Win a championship.
- Make an All-Star team.
- Start a charity in his name.

"I feel like I owe my community," says Lewis, who left the Sonics for the Orlando Magic this offseason.

The Rashard Lewis Foundation illustrates one problem when athletes start their own nonprofits. They often lack a specific motivation or focus, other than the reasoning kids often offer parents — everybody else is doing it.

"What most athletes are trying to do," says Jim Marsh, former community-relations director for the Sonics, "is let the world know they haven't forgotten their roots."

But the most successful sports charities share a higher level of involvement. Lewis couldn't name his board of directors. He had no clear plans, other than his mother and girlfriend being more involved.

There's nothing wrong with wanting to help or wanting to make a difference. But experts say it helps to have a specific plan.

Lewis, 28, grew up in Houston, and he says the NBA stars who visited summer basketball camps during his childhood made an impact.

And Lewis clearly has done the same in this community. The 6-foot-10 forward is a natural in front of children, a self-described "big kid" who built a movie theater that bears his name in the Ronald McDonald House in 2003. He laughs, remembering the time he watched "Over the Hedge" while kids checked to make sure he didn't fall asleep.

Lewis eventually created the Rashard Lewis Foundation, checking that box next to charity. In 2005, his expenses were \$15,594. More than two-thirds, \$10,932, went to program services — a celebrity softball game, a food drive and a kids' holiday shopping spree. All good works, but not at the level Lewis wants. "I see it as more of the beginning," he says.

Still, his goals remain unclear: "I don't know," Lewis says. "It will be a lot bigger and better and stronger foundation."