



Curry classroom

Food-loving basketball star Fab Flourney has an eye on a restaurant prize one day with a plan to open up a soul food eaterie. He's as dedicated in the kitchen as he is on the court



Anything, as long as it's chicken. That's the food deal that goes with Fab Flourney, the Newcastle Eagles basketball star. Pity his

poor girlfriend.

Well, not really. If chicken is on the menu then Fab will have shopped for it, prepared it and serves it up on a plate, job done. He's a man as dedicated in the kitchen as he is on court.

Food and Fab go hand in hand. His upbringing in the New York Bronx gave him a passion for what we call soul food - corn bread, friend chicken, black eyed peas, ribs and mac n' cheese.

And he sees his kitchen as something of a sanctuary where he can lose himself in the business of making good food.

Fab, now 39, is the player-coach for the Eagles and basketball commentator on BBC 5. He's also the most successful coach ever in British Basketball.

Naturally, his days are spent playing, coaching and training but he is also a flamboyant motivational speaker.

His fitness and agility are everything - he's into his 40th year and still playing whereas convention would have it that 33-35 are the retirement years in his sport.

Needless to say, he takes his diet seriously and is in total control of what comes out of the kitchen.

He jokes about the daily dilemma he shares with his girlfriend - what to eat tonight? Inevitably during the day he will have been home and prepped their supper - which will have involved chicken!

"I would say that cooking has prolonged my career," says the lean 6ft 4 chap.

"Everything I eat is healthy - but I have a very sweet tooth that I keep under control "I like the taste of food, rich ingredients - I buy all my food and I know what is going into my body.

"I don't drink alcohol but I love grape juice and fruits like pineapple which are rich in natural anti-inflammatory properties.

"I am 39 and still going because of the things I have done in my diet. Eating healthily doesn't have to be about food being unsatisfying, you just apply a different ethos.

"If I am angry about anything then I will get into the kitchen and do some baking - to give me something sweet to look forward to.

"I like the concentration of cooking and the fact that you can lose yourself in a recipe. It is relaxing and I love the attention to detail of cooking, striving to make it look and taste good for others to eat."

Fab's love of food and cooking is down to the warm memories of his childhood in the US. The family would all have their tasks and chores - and learning how to prepare a meal was an integral part of that.

"We had a rota of cleaning and then as you got older there was the cooking - we'd watch my mom and learn from her. Basic foods - ribs, chicken, mac and cheese, red rice with kidney beans and garlic, spaghetti. I know how to cook from watching her not from educating myself to do it.

"I am a home cook and I find cooking therapeutic for me. If I have not played as well as I would have liked, I come home and cook and because I am a perfectionist I am concentrating on the food and forgetting everything else.

"You can't rush food. I love to take my time and cook at my own pace."

Fab has a shellfish allergy and rarely eats red meat though he is a fan of chicken, turkey and fish. His weakness is for puddings - he loves sweet things.

One of his brothers is training to be a chef and Fab would like one day to open a restaurant; "a family business employing everyone", he says.

"It's a tough business though - I watch Gordon Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares and you realise you have to get so much right,

Fab's Food Life

A childhood food memory: Home-made cornbread, it never tastes the same anywhere else. College greens - spring greens steamed like cabbage with a teaspoon of vinegar and sugar with bits of bacon and turkey.

Fried chicken - I take the skin off now because it's the healthiest way but the batter of egg milk and flour makes for the best crispness.

Black eyed peas with turkey.

Inspirational chef: I don't eat out very much or watch chefs on TV - I liked the Hairy Bikers' Deep South though. The problem I've got with TV chefs is that I watch them doing something then want to make it straight away but the ingredients are never in the cupboards!

Last meal you ate: Granola with skimmed milk and brown rice with chicken and guacamole.

A meal that inspired you: Cooking reminds me of home so it would be any meal that we cooked as a family - as a kid I would be in charge of peeling potatoes then you would gravitate to the meat and do the seasoning for the meat - watch it cooking, take it out, season it. I love roast chicken but with beetroot, no gravy - I hate that thing of meat swimming in gravy. At home we never had a choice we would eat whatever it was we were having tonight.

Favourite wine: Once a year I will have a drink to toast my brother who died. I don't like the taste of alcohol and the drink thing passed me by - I got to about 25 and would think 'this is going to be my first drink' but I never wanted to drink and I don't feel I am missing anything.

Favourite ingredient: Garlic, chicken, ice-cream.

Your last meal: Chocolate cakes, peanut butter cake, peach cobbler, sweet potato pie - and anything that came out of my mom's kitchen.



the food, the location, customers you're selling to - you have to love food but there's much more."

Bob Arora owns Sachins, Forth Banks, Newcastle. www.sachins.co.uk

If I am angry about something then I will head into the kitchen and do some baking. You can lose yourself in the recipe

On the menu: Fab's Hollywood Chicks



What it's got going for it: A more complex Indian dish which would wow at a dinner party - it'll make you look like a kitchen pro.

What's the trick: The clever way of poaching the chicken to keep it succulent and make the flavours stand out.

Serves 4 people

The dish is prepared in three parts: the stuffing, the sauce and then the poached, stuffed chicken.

Sauce:

Ingredients

2 tbsp	Oil	1/2 tsp	Ground black pepper
4	Onions, finely chopped	100ml	Water
1	Clove garlic, finely chopped	3 tsp	Fresh coriander, chopped
1 inch	Piece of ginger, finely chopped	25g	Butter
1/2 tsp	Turmeric	2 tbsp	Cream
1/4 tsp	Chilli (to taste)	1	Tin chopped tomatoes

Method

Heat the oil in a frying pan and add the onions, sweat and cook until slightly caramelised. Add all the other spice ingredients (except coriander) and cook for ten minutes. This is the basis of your masala - or sauce.

Add the tomatoes and about 50ml water. Then simmer for another 5-10 minutes.

Add small amounts of water if the sauce gets too dry. Add salt to taste and the fresh coriander.

Once cooked, the sauce is whizzed in a blender to velvety texture - add the cream and butter after the sauce is blended and keep to one side while the chicken is prepared.

The chicken:

Ingredients

2	Large chicken breasts (including the supremes)	5	Cardamom pods
		3	Bay leaves
1 tsp	Turmeric		Paprika
1 tsp	Salt		Oil
1 1/2 tsp	Black pepper		Water
2	Chunks cinnamon (5cms)		Clingfilm
3	Star anise		

Method

Half the chicken breasts lengthways and detach the supremes. Take the breasts and bash them flat and smooth to leave four thin pieces of chicken.

Take the remaining chicken supremes and put them in a blender with the turmeric, salt and black pepper. Pulse the mixture until it forms a smooth paste.

Add the other spice ingredients to a pan of cold water and bring it to the boil.

Take a large sheet of clingfilm. Lay one of the chicken breasts on it then spread a layer of the chicken paste mix on top. Place another chicken breast on top - like a sandwich.

Wrap the mixture like a sausage in the cling film, rolling tightly and tying at the ends - they must be watertight for cooking. You will have what look like two fat sausages. In the pan of boiling water place the two 'sausages' and cook for about ten minutes. Carefully remove the cling film (it will be very hot).

Mix two teaspoons of paprika with a tablespoon of oil and roll the chicken in this.

In a hot frying pan cook the chicken for a few minutes to crisp the outside and add some colour.

Place the sauce in a bowl. Slice the chicken into small discs and place on the sauce mixture.

Serve with rice and naan bread.



The family kitchen was the place where Fab learned all his skills - starting with the onion-chopping



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