NBA champion Ariel Hukporti receives Porsche Turbo Award

17/07/2026 Ariel Hukporti returns to Stuttgart as an NBA champion. At the Porsche Museum, the 24-year-old was presented with the Porsche Turbo Award – an honour that he aspired to achieve as a young player in the Porsche Basketball Academy. For the first time, Porsche's youth development programme is recognising a former athlete from one of its partner clubs. Hukporti spent five years in Ludwigsburg, first developing in the academy before progressing to the professional ranks with MHP RIESEN Ludwigsburg.

Ariel Hukporti stands in the Porsche Museum, halfway through a guided tour, surrounded by trophies on display among iconic racing cars. In New York, he is known as 'Big A' and wears the number 55 on his jersey. But today he is transported back to feeling like the young player from Ludwigsburg who spent years hoping to one day receive this very award. The museum is bustling with visitors. The special exhibition 'Raceborn – 75 Years of Porsche Motorsport' has only recently opened. Yet, for a brief moment, the spotlight belongs entirely to him.

Marc Lieb, Team Lead Sports Communications at Porsche AG, former Porsche works driver and Le

Mans winner, presents him with the 2026 Porsche Turbo Award, engraved with the words 'Outstanding Achievement'. Hukporti holds the trophy almost in disbelief before breaking into a smile. "You can't imagine how much this award means to me," he says. "It may sound strange, but this award is almost as important to me as my NBA championship ring."

Yet, it is far from the first trophy of his career. During his youth, Hukporti won almost every individual honour available in his leagues: Rookie of the Year, Defensive Player of the Year, Most Valuable Player (MVP) and All-Star Game MVP. In June 2026, he added the biggest achievement of his career to date, winning the NBA championship with the New York Knicks. The 2.13-metre-tall centre, whose role is to defend the basket, became only the third German player to win an NBA title, after Dirk Nowitzki and Isaiah Hartenstein.

Despite the significance of that remarkable achievement, the award presented to Hukporti in Stuttgart does not feel like a minor accolade in comparison. For him, it is part of a story that began long before his arrival in New York. "I waited every year to win it," he recalls. "I was there at every ceremony, always ready to stand up and collect it, but my name was never called. This award really motivated me. Every year I was genuinely disappointed when I didn't get it."

It is the response of a fiercely ambitious athlete, someone capable of turning setbacks into motivation for the next training session. Now, years later, he has finally achieved the very award he had long dreamed of winning. With the special Outstanding Achievement category, Porsche is recognising a former athlete from its partner clubs for the first time. The award honours Hukporti's journey from the Ludwigsburg academy system to the pinnacle of professional basketball as an NBA champion.

No Plan B

Hukporti was born on 12 April 2002 in Stralsund and later moved via Freiburg to Ludwigsburg. In 2016, he joined the Porsche Basketball Academy, where he developed through Germany's top youth competitions, playing in the JBBL and NBBL – the highest national leagues for boys' U16 and U19 basketball – as well as in the Regionalliga.

He also began training with the professional team at an early age. At just 16, he made his debut for MHP RIESEN Ludwigsburg in Germany's Basketball Bundesliga. "When I started in Ludwigsburg, I was really bad," he says, recalling his first days there. "I was just tall." He then begins naming the coaches, mentors and friends who believed in him from the outset, two of whom accompanied him to the Porsche Museum: David McCray, Sporting Director of MHP RIESEN, and Tyreese Blunt, a close friend and former teammate.

The Ludwigsburg team developed into a remarkable group. "They were a very close-knit group of friends, and most of them still are today," says McCray. "Ten of the 12 players went on to become professionals. Just think about that." According to McCray, Hukporti's talent raised the level of everyone around him, driving the group forward and pushing his teammates to improve every day. "The

competition in practice was sometimes tougher than in actual games," recalls Blunt. "We could have given Hukporti the award for greatest sporting development every single year during his youth career," says McCray. "But we didn't, because we also wanted to give other players the opportunity to be recognised." At the time, only a few people realised how much that mattered to Hukporti.

From Ludwigsburg, his journey took him to Lithuania and Australia. Along the way came a series of setbacks, many of them towards the end of a season: a broken leg, a ruptured Achilles tendon and meniscus problems. "Everything," Hukporti replies when asked what was most difficult. "The injuries themselves, but also the mental challenges that came with them." And yet, giving up was never an option. There was no Plan B. "So many people believed in me and invested their time and money in me," he says. "I couldn't just turn around and say: 'That's it, I'm done.'"

From the final pick to NBA champion

In 2024, Hukporti returned to Ludwigsburg one more time. Shortly afterwards, he entered the NBA Draft, the league's selection process for emerging and international talents. He was chosen with the 58th and final pick. The Dallas Mavericks initially acquired his draft rights before transferring them to the New York Knicks later that same evening. For many players, being selected with the last pick would mean an uncertain beginning. For Hukporti, it was simply a way in. "Going undrafted or being the last pick doesn't mean the end," he says. "It just means that a lot of people didn't believe in you yet." Though he never doubted himself.

In June 2026, Hukporti experienced the biggest moment of his basketball career to date as the New York Knicks defeated the San Antonio Spurs in the NBA Finals to secure their first championship in 53 years. Hukporti served as the team's third centre, logging limited but meaningful minutes throughout the playoffs and the Finals. He describes that role in characteristically matter-of-fact terms. It was never about taking the most shots or filling the stat sheet. It was about being ready when called upon. "Everyone understood their role," he says. "Everyone was playing for the championship. Everyone accepted their role."

When the decisive game was over, the pressure finally lifted. "Relieved," he says, searching for the right word to describe the feeling. There was joy, of course. But there was also a sense of disbelief. As a child, he used to win NBA championships on the NBA 2K video game. Suddenly, he found himself standing in a real NBA arena, surrounded by players he had once admired from afar. "It's like being in a movie."

Team spirit, respect and responsibility

The visit to the Porsche Museum also reconnects Hukporti with an important chapter of his own story. Through its Turbo for Talents youth development programme, Porsche supports young athletes at partner clubs across a range of sports. In basketball, the sports car manufacturer is the title partner of the Porsche Basketball Academy Ludwigsburg, the youth development department of MHP RIESEN

Ludwigsburg. Each year, the Porsche Turbo Award traditionally recognises young athletes in three categories: Most Improved Player, Best Academic Achievement and Outstanding Social Commitment. Together with its partner clubs, Porsche uses the awards to underline the core objective of its youth development activities: supporting young people not only in their sporting careers, but also in their personal and social development. In Hukporti's case, however, there is a double first. The 24-year-old becomes the first alumnus of the programme to receive the award and the first recipient in the special 'Outstanding Achievement' category.

Speaking with Lieb, who presents him with the award, Hukporti reflects on pressure, teamwork and routines. It is a conversation between two athletes from very different sporting worlds, yet they quickly find common ground. "I learned a tremendous amount through the Porsche Basketball Academy and Porsche's youth development programme, not only as an athlete," says Hukporti. "I was also taught values such as team spirit, respect and responsibility, which continue to shape me today and help me in the NBA." When asked what advice he would give to young players, his answer is simple: "Never give up."

Following the championship triumph, Hukporti has already taken the next step in his NBA career. In July 2026, as a free agent, he agreed a one-year contract with the Philadelphia 76ers.

Porsche youth development programme: Turbo for Talents

Dr. Ing. h.c. F. Porsche AG takes its social responsibility seriously and invests purposefully in the future through its sports youth development programme. Under the motto 'Turbo for Talents', Porsche supports young athletes at a total of eight partner organisations across football, basketball, ice hockey and tennis. The programme goes beyond supporting high-quality sporting development. It also focuses on the personal and social growth of children and young people. Through the 'Talents Hand in Hand' initiative, Porsche works together with social institutions to raise awareness among young athletes of socially relevant issues such as inclusion, environmental responsibility and health. At the same time, the initiative helps to improve access to sporting activities and community experiences for socially disadvantaged individuals. Former football world champion Sami Khedira serves as the programme's ambassador. Further information about Porsche's wide-ranging youth development activities is available at www.turbofuertalente.de.

MEDIA ENQUIRIES

Markus Rothermel

Spokesperson Sports Communications
+49 (0) 170 / 911 0779
markus.rothermel@porsche.de

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