

BRINGING **Dad** HIS HEROS

When former New York Giants running back Tiki Barber retired after the 2006 season, he missed you.

“The problem is, once you retire, you kind of lose that connection to your community,” says Barber, who still lives in New York. “Replaced on the field and then ultimately in people’s minds. So while you have fans, you don’t have access to them.”

Barber changed that 10 months ago when he founded Thuzio, a company with a clientele of athletes – including former Miami Heat player Tim Hardaway and current Miami Dolphin Paul Solai – who will hang out with you. For a price.

The company has the majority of its athletes available in either New York or South Florida. A typical rental: Pay \$1,000 to have lunch with Larry Little, the Hall of Fame guard on the perfect-season 1972 Dolphins.

Barber says each athlete who participates chooses what events are available on the website, ranging anywhere from \$149 for a phone call with Hardway to \$4,000 for a coaching session with Solai. Bowling (yes, bowling) will set you back around \$625, depending on the athlete.

“What we’re attempting to, and what I think we’ve done, is give those who have great talent the ability to control their brand and monetize in ways that weren’t possible before,” Barber says.

www.thuzio.com

MARCUSTHIGPEN: BEING THE FATHER HE NEVER HAD

At 26, Miami Dolphins wide receiver Marcus Thigpen is one of the younger members of Thuzio, and he’s been rented out for only one day so far – although, he says, “It was pretty cool. I just signed some autographs and took some pictures.”

He got involved because he thought it was an easy way to make some extra money. After all, he has four young children to support – three daughters between 2 and 9 and a 3-year-old son.

With such a large family, Father’s Day is important to Thigpen. Last year, “It was cool. My kids got me a lot of balloons and cards, some candy, took me out to eat. Basically just chilled with them on the beach. It was a good day.”

And this year?

“I don’t know, they may have something up their sleeves. I’m looking forward to it. My wife is always trying to surprise me, so I don’t know what to expect.”

It’s quite a change from his own rough upbringing in Detroit.

“My dad was never really around so we didn’t celebrate Father’s Day. My father was my mother, so I celebrated with her,” he recalls. “But for me, it’s a lot different because I’m involved with my kids life, and they love me. So to have that experience with them is a blessing.”

