

**Sports People**

**Canada's Rookie of the Year is a native son**

By SAM DAVIS  
Chronicle Sports Editor

Just one look at the court where Charles Douthit grew up playing basketball will let you know that he is a humble, "down home" kind of guy.

The weather-beaten cedar post that serves as the support for his hoop has been there since his father replaced an old bushel basket where the two used to shoot baskets a decade ago.

Children from the neighborhood have beaten a path alongside the winding dirt road that leads to the Douthit household. The portion of the yard where Douthit and his friends played basketball is sunken from repeated poundings of feet.

From all appearances, it is not the likely childhood basketball court of the National Rookie of the Year in, of all things, Canadian collegiate basketball.

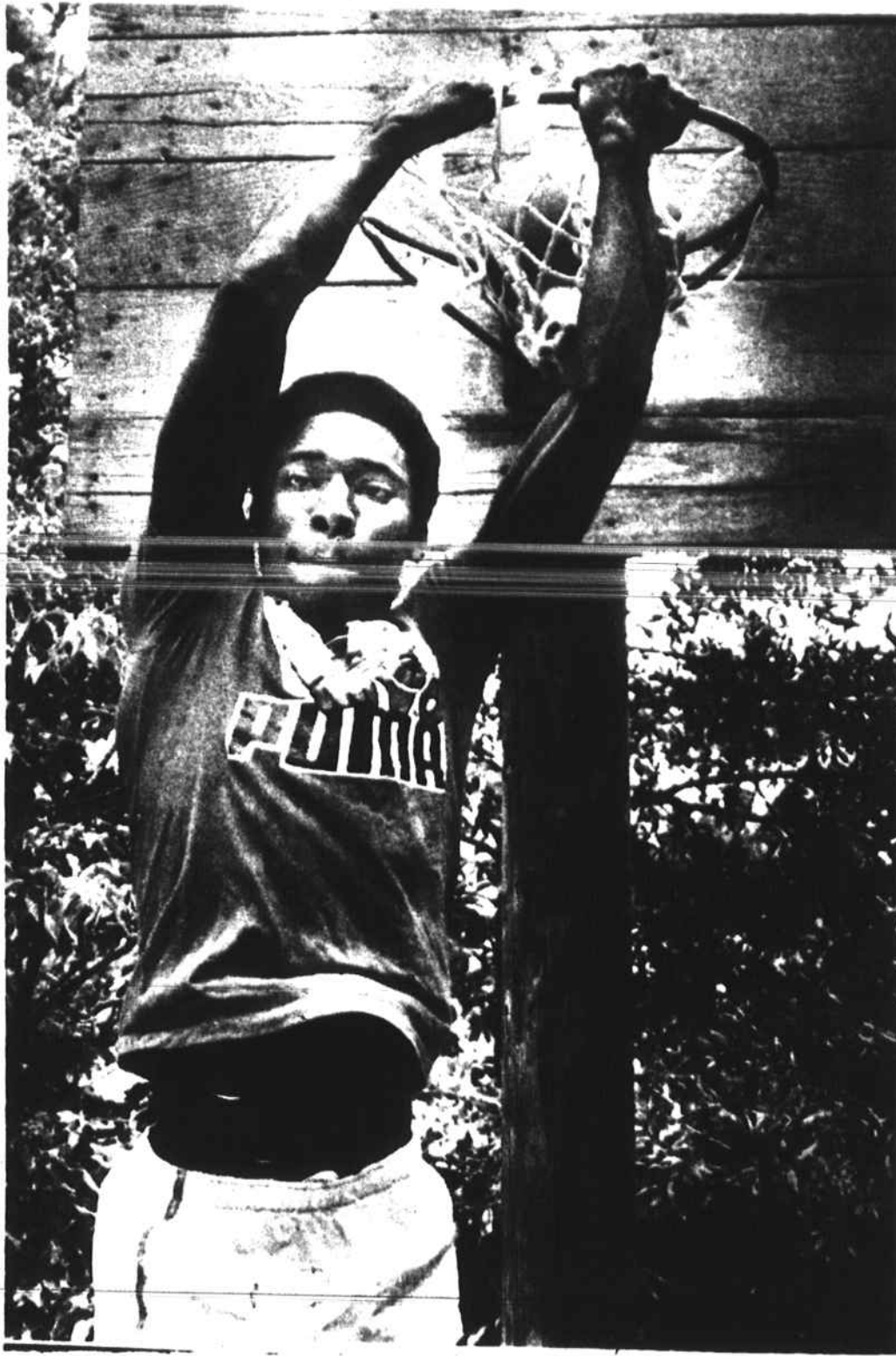
The secluded split level home where the Douthits live is covered with memorabilia attesting to the athletic talents of their eldest son. Trophies line the walls and several table tops in the household.

time to shine again.

As a high school junior, Douthit, a 6'4" small forward, was tabbed by the *Winston-Salem Journal* as its Frank Spencer Award winner -- the most valuable player in Northwest North Carolina. He was also named the North Piedmont Conference's Player of the Year and earned a spot on the all-state team. His 22-point average had major colleges drooling as his team stood atop the 3-A standings for more than eight weeks.

But when he became a senior, Douthit's stock among college recruiters began to plummet. While his average only dropped by one point per game, his team struggled through a .500 season. Worse than that, his grade-point average dwindled close to the 2.0 cutoff which is required for admission to NCAA Division I schools. Following his senior season, none of the major colleges came calling.

"When I look back on it, I know that it was my grades that kept them (recruiters) away," says Douthit. "I didn't really concentrate on studying or doing my work in high school and none



**Sure Shot**

Charles Douthit, known also as "Punkin'," dunkin' (photo by James Parker).

of the major colleges were interested in me once they saw I didn't have the grades."

In fact, the only schools that wanted him were junior colleges. Thus, Douthit enrolled at Surry Community College.

"I did pretty good playing ball there," he says. "I worked on a lot of my weak areas and put more emphasis on my school work. But, before I left for the summer, I was told that the basketball program there was being phased out."

Douthit became a little depressed, but still felt he could play major college basketball. Little did he know that only six months later he'd be a member of a collegiate team vying for a national championship.

"After they told us the program at Surry (Community College) was folding, I didn't know if I'd get another shot at playing ball," Douthit says, "so I came home to do some thinking and try to find out what my next move was going to be."

Fortunately for Douthit, several things fell into place that caused a remarkable change in

his future. The head coach from Brandon University in Canada, acting on a whim, spotted Douthit in a summer league game at Carver High School and was sold on signing the Midway native. Still, Douthit didn't find out until the end of September that he would be playing college basketball in Canada.

"I had no idea things would work out the way they did," he says. "I was working at Park Place Restaurant (at Winston Square) last summer trying to figure out if I'd ever get another chance to play basketball when Coach Hemmings came in one day and said he wanted to see me play."

"I didn't know how to react to him at first," Douthit says. "I thought he was a crank at first. He told me that he had coached at Surry Community College a few years back and that he had heard a lot of good things about

me. But I didn't know that he would offer me a chance to play ball in Canada."

Though coach Hemmings liked what he saw in Douthit, he couldn't offer him a scholarship right away. According to Canadian collegiate basketball rules, no more than three Americans are allowed on each team and Brandon already had three. However, one of the Americans didn't return to school last fall and Hemmings gave Douthit a call when he found out about it.

"I had begun to wonder whether or not I would hear from Coach Hemmings," Douthit says. "It had been about two months since I first talked to him and I was beginning to wonder if things were going to work out."

Late one night in September, the call finally came. "I was kind of surprised when he asked me if I was ready to come up and

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*"When I look back on it, I know it was my grades that kept them (recruiters) away. I didn't really concentrate on studying or doing my work in high school and none of the major colleges were interested in me once they saw I didn't have the grades."*

You can tell from the way his family talks when you ask questions about Douthit, or "Punkin'," as they call him, that they have a special love and respect for him.

"Punkin'" played basketball constantly when he was growing up," says his mother, Patricia Douthit. "All the boys from the neighborhood would come over to our yard and play every day. Most nights they would be out there up until about 10 o'clock."

"We had no idea that he would develop into a really good basketball player," she continues. "He was cut from the team in the fifth grade and that made him work harder. From that point on, he kept improving every year."

Yet, Mrs. Douthit knows her son's future in sports could have ended last spring, just as it has every spring for a number of high school basketball stars who never realize their dreams of playing on the collegiate level.

Things looked pretty bleak for Douthit when he returned home after a brief stint as a collegiate player. Yet, he refused to put blame on anyone else or make excuses for not getting the chance to play for a major college. Instead, he continued to polish his game and waited patiently for his

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By Gregory Davis

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