

# Recruiting today is key to championships tomorrow

By **PATTON McDOWELL**  
Assistant Sports Editor

The November air is chilly as it whips around the small brick gymnasium. Inside, the sounds of squeaking shoes and a high school coach's whistle are the only audible signs of an early-season intrasquad scrimmage.

There are no bright lights here, nor are there thousands of screaming fans. Dick Vitale is not here to provide clever court-side commentary, nor will Holly Farms reward the game's best player. Only a handful of parents and friends have braved the weather to watch a group of players who largely exceed their skill level with their ability to hustle.

One sophomore, however, is making this scrimmage more than just routine. He is noticed immediately by the coaches, whose eyes widen whenever a young prospect approaches them who is taller than they are. This young man is 6-foot-6 and, unlike many of his awkward classmates, his skill and maturity match his bountiful height.

First, it was just a rebound. The ball caromed off the back of the rim and appeared to be sailing back to the foul line. The young sophomore timed his running jump from the left side and bounded into the air far above the outstretched arms of his companions. He quickly brought the ball down just beneath his chin and fired a crisp chest pass to a teammate downcourt.

The eager teammate rushed for the basket, uncontested. Like many other sophomores, however, shooting a lay-up from the left side was not yet a perfected skill, and a mix-up of footwork caused the ball to be lofted clumsily against the backboard.

On the sideline the coach notices just at that instant, that while the ball is bouncing away from the rim, the sleek figure of that 6-foot-6 sophomore is moving to the goal at an alarming speed. In one single fluid motion, the errant shot is retrieved high above the rim by two large and sure hands, and dunked cleanly through the basket.

The coach's whistle has dropped from his gaping mouth, and his assistant cannot conceal a smile on behalf of the team's good fortune.

"That kid is going to be a player," one said to another. "Big time."

For this young player, the saga now begins. Before long, his abilities will be spread by word of mouth, and his name will become a topic of conversation for recruiters and college coaches everywhere. In three years, he may be the most heralded freshman player in the land — or the victim of his own oversensationalized image.

The amount of attention that can be given to a seventeen-year old athlete is simply amazing. But by many recruiting standards, seventeen is almost over the hill. For recruiting experts like Bob Gibbons of All Star Sports and Tom Konchalski of the High School Basketball Index, scarce is the seventeen-year-old with college potential that escapes their notice.

Recruiting is big business, not unlike the industry it serves. Both Gibbons and Konchalski charge \$300 per year for their service to colleges and universities. In exchange for this fee, they provide the colleges with an exhaustive list of the high school talent available, broken down by class, position, or location.

It is certainly not a foolproof method, but college coaches depend

## Bob Gibbons' Top 30

1. Alonzo Mourning (Va.)	6-10	G'town
2. Billy Owens (Pa.)	6-8	Syracuse
3. Stanley Roberts (S.C.)	6-11	LSU
4. <b>Kenny Williams (N.C.)</b>	<b>6-9</b>	<b>UNC</b>
5. Chris Mills (Ca.)	6-7	Kentucky
6. Shawn Kemp (In.)	6-10	Kentucky
7. Cesar Portillo (Fla.)	6-9	Florida
8. Todd Day (Tenn.)	6-7	Arkansas
9. Don MacLean (Ca.)	6-10	undecided
10. Lee Mayberry (Ok.)	6-2	Arkansas
11. Darrick Martin (Ca.)	5-11	undecided
12. LaPhonso Ellis (Il.)	6-9	Notre Dame
13. Jerrod Mustaf (Md.)	6-10	undecided
14. Chris Jackson (Ms.)	6-0	undecided
15. Stacey Poole (Fl.)	6-5	undecided
16. Christian Laettner (N.Y.)	6-10	Duke
17. Eric Anderson (Il.)	6-8	Indiana
18. Anthony Peeler (Mo.)	6-5	Missouri
19. Matt Steigenga (Mi.)	6-7	Michigan St.
20. Malik Sealy (N.Y.)	6-7	St. John's
21. David Johnson (La.)	6-5	Syracuse
22. Derrick Daniels (Tx.)	6-2	Houston
23. Mike Peplowski (Mi.)	6-10	Michigan St.
24. Robert Werdann (N.Y.)	6-10	St. John's
25. Joe Rhett (S.C.)	6-8	undecided
26. Marc Dowdell (N.J.)	6-9	Villanova
27. Everick Sullivan (S.C.)	6-5	Louisville
28. Walter Williams (Md.)	6-8	Maryland
29. Tommy Gaines (Ga.)	6-5	Georgia
30. Adam Keeffe (Ca.)	6-9	Stanford

dearly on the scouting instincts of these basketball hounds who roam the country searching for undiscovered talent. They swelter in the summer heat at Howard Garfinkel's Five-Star Basketball Camps, B/C Camps, the Metro Index Camp and the Prep Stars Invitational. They are there at the Beach Ball Classic, the Raleigh Times Tournament, the King Cotton Classic, and countless other Christmas tourneys.

What do they find out? Enough for Gibbons to determine the best 500 seniors playing high school basketball in this country. If that is not enough, he can tell you who the best 500 juniors are, and yes, even the top 500 sophomores.

Who do the recruiting experts say is the best senior in the land this year? If the name is not familiar now, it will be soon. 6-foot-9 center Alonzo Mourning of Chesapeake Indian River High School set an AAU record in the 19-and-under division by blocking a phenomenal 27 shots in one game.

"He is the most dominant force in high school basketball since Pat Ewing," Konchalski said. "He is a total warrior."

Like Ewing, Mourning will leave the high school ranks for the tutelage of Georgetown coach John Thompson.

While recruiters differ on the exact ranking of their top five or ten seniors, Billy Owens of Carlisle, Pa., is not far from the top of anyone's list. Owens, a 6-foot-8 forward, is a multi-talented threat for high school coach Dave Lebo. Lebo's son Jeff, a junior guard for the Tar Heels, recalls playing with Owens when he was a senior in high school.

"He was only about 6-3 or 6-4 when I played with him, and then all of the sudden he just grew," Lebo said. "But even after he grew, he maintained the guard-like qualities of passing and dribbling. The player who comes to mind most when I think of Billy is Reggie Williams (now of the L.A. Clippers). He is that versatile."

Owens had narrowed his list to

Syracuse, UNC and Villanova, and Wednesday announced that he would be signing with the Orangemen. Owens has a brother who plays football for Syracuse.

Kenny Williams, a 6-foot-9 forward from Elizabeth City Northeastern, has been the top North Carolina prospect to come along since (who else) Michael Jordan. Like Jordan, Williams inked with the Tar Heels during the early signing period. Considered an excellent leaper and shooter, Williams is also a deft passer and exceptionally fast at running the court. Other than a scrimmage with Alonzo Mourning's Indian River team on November 28, Williams' main challenge will come in the classroom, as he seeks to avoid becoming a Prop 48 casualty — a fate that Mourning and Owens have not eluded yet, either.

If any school has really gotten a jump on the rest of the field during the early signing period, Kentucky has. Coach Eddie Sutton claimed the best recruiting class last year, and is awfully close to repeating that feat with the signings of top-10 preps Shawn Kemp and Chris Mills.

Kemp, a 6-foot-10 center, and Mills, a 6-foot-7 forward, decided last summer that they wanted to go to the same school. Kemp, however, wanted to go to Indiana, while Mills wanted to run with the Rebels of UNLV. Apparently a compromise was made, and both signed the Wildcats.

Around the ACC, several schools have bolstered their basketball corps during the early signing period. Wake Forest grabbed the second-best player in the state by getting 6-foot-7 forward Chris King from Newton Grove. King joins 6-foot-8 Phil Medlin from Greenville D.H. Conley, and 5-foot-10 speedster Derrick McQueen (Cozell's cousin) from Darlington, S.C., as early Deacon signees.

Maryland outdueled UNC for 6-foot-8 forward Walter Williams of Temple Hills, Maryland., while Virginia grabbed 6-foot-6 forward Bryant Stith of Lawrenceville, Va. Stith is not only a versatile player, but carries a 4.125 grade point average on a scale of 4.0.

Duke jumped on the early signing bandwagon by getting 6-foot-10 Crawford Palmer from Arlington, Va., and 6-foot-10 Christian Laettner

from Buffalo, New York. Both should add to the Blue Devils' already formidable lineup.

While many of the top seniors remain unsigned, speculation as to their final choices runs rampant. Speculation is not limited to the seniors, however. Take everyone's top junior prospect for example, 6-foot-1 point guard Kenny Anderson from Archbishop Molloy High School in Queens, N.Y. While many assume he will follow cousin Kenny Smith and play for the Tar Heels, others say that Georgetown and Duke are making strong moves for his services as well.

"Kenny Anderson is is the best young guard I have ever seen," Konchalski said. "He has great hands, tremendous quickness, and sees the game like no other guard in high school."

Yes, even sophomores do not avoid

the watchful eye of the recruiters. Damon Bailey, a 6-foot-2 guard from Bedford, Indiana, led his high school team to the final four of the state basketball tournament as a freshman. Indiana coach Bob Knight was reportedly so impressed with Bailey's abilities as a eighth grader that he tried to make him Steve Alford's role model. While Bailey has certainly not achieved Alford's status, his 40-inch vertical and all-around ability should help pave the way for future successes.

For most fans, the excitement of basketball still comes in the great domed arenas in front of thousands of people. But for basketball fans with a knack for recruiting, old brick gymnasiums with lanky 6-foot-6 sophomores provide a different kind of excitement — the excitement of untapped potential, waiting to be discovered.

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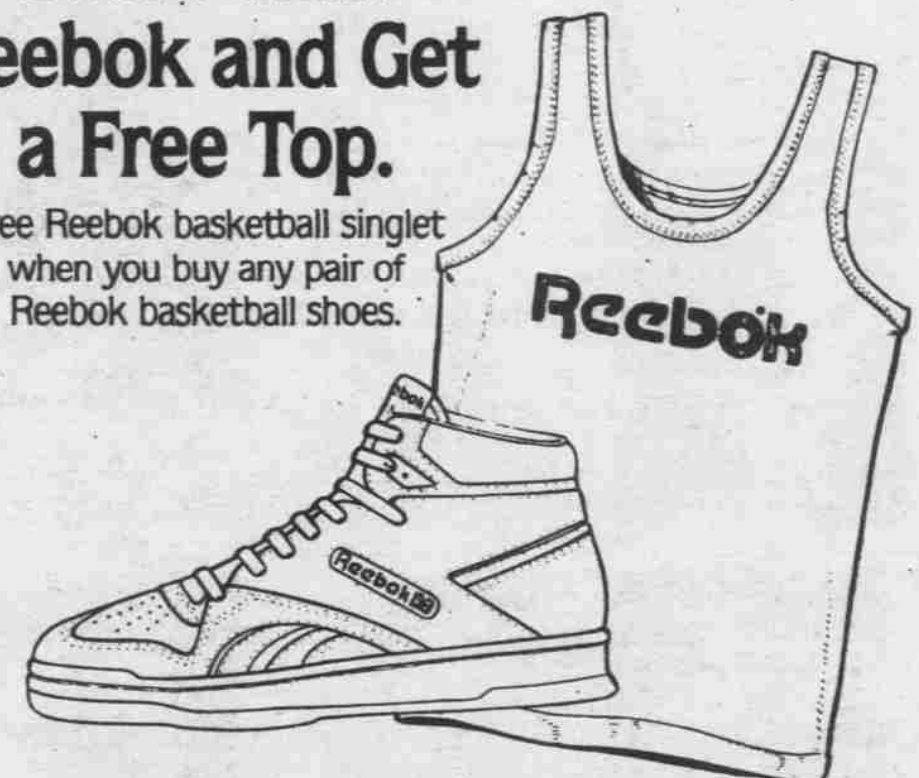
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