

FEATURES



ECSU's Sam Hanef shows off his skill at pool in the University Center.

Sam Hanef: Just an ordinary guy

By Ursula McMillion

Sam Hanef sees himself as an ordinary guy, but not everyone else in the world treats him that way. Arms buried in his jacket pockets Sam has struck up conversations with people and then observed them change when he removes his forearms from his pockets.

That's when they see he doesn't have any hands. But Sam, a 17-year old freshman from Durham, doesn't let his lack of hands slow him down. If this fact is a problem for the other person, he isn't going to try to make someone accept something that person has an inhibition about.

"A handicap is a unique part of a person," he says. "A handicap can be an advantage a lot of the times. It shows you and others that you should not take things for granted. It makes you respect life and people more."

Sam, a member of the ECSU track team, plays basketball, shoots pool, plays ping pong and cuts his own hair. He has a special love for sports, especially football. He started in the kicker and strong safety positions for his high school football team.

"I have pretty much done everything at this point that I've wanted to," he says. "I don't have any set limitations and I believe that everything I want is attainable. The physical part is small. I just improvise and do it a different way, but I'll get the job done."

Sam's friends on the ECSU campus often marvel at his abilities. "When I first saw him I wondered how he did things and how he would make it through college," says Phillip Batiste, a sophomore from Louisiana. "Then I saw him do things and I was simply amazed. I walked into his room one day and he was cutting his own hair. I saw him eating in the cafe and it took me by surprise that he could do things as well as anyone with hands could."

Phillip's admiration grew even more when he saw Sam throwing and catching a football.

When the two of them are hanging out they usually talk about Sam's favorite teams: the Minnesota Vikings, Timberwolves and Twins.

Sam's roommate, Vincent McKnight, still remembers the first time he ever met Sam; it was at football practice during their junior year in high school.

"When I saw him kick for the first time, I was surprised that he could kick so far and then I was really surprised when I saw him throw the ball. He has a really good arm."

McKnight says he doesn't really consider Sam to be handicapped. "He does every thing that I do and most things better. He's a better

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writer than I am and he helps me with a lot of my papers."

Sam's basketball skills are have also gained him respect, says freshman Tarick Scott. When Scott first met Sam on the court he thought that he was going to have to take it easy on Sam because of his lack of hands.

"After the game started I saw that he could really play and that I really had to guard him because he could shoot," said Tarick.

On ECSU's campus Sam recalls getting a few "looks" in the beginning of the semester. He says he isn't offended by them. Sam Hanef is no novice at coping with life's cruel little twists and digs.

Back in grade school and junior high he often got picked on. "The other children would say 'you don't have any hands,' over and over because they couldn't say that I couldn't do things," he recalls. "They tried to remind me of my not having hands in hopes of making me feel inferior to them."

In dealing with discrimination, Sam often recalled these words of advice from his father: "This is who you are. You're you and they're the ones with the problem if they can't accept you."

Sam understands the inhibitions people have about approaching and dealing with those who are different.

"I'm the only one who has to live with myself. If I'm happy with who I am and satisfied with my life, then why should I worry about what other people think of me? I'm not going to try force people to understand or come to terms with me."

To Sam, this problem stems from other people's inability "to effectively deal with unique situations." He believes everyone should be treated normally. "Don't make a big deal about a handicap

or draw attention to something when it's not necessary. Don't feel sorry for anyone especially!"

Sam has never attended any special schools for the handicapped. His parents did get him to try artificial hands at one point, but Sam says he does better without them.

"I like to feel whatever I'm touching, and you can't feel with artificial limbs."

Sam isn't sure about the cause of his lack of hands, because he was adopted. He has never tried to find his real parents because he believes that his natural parents gave him up for adoption because of his condition.

Although Sam was adopted in Lebanon, he is not sure if he was actually born there.

Sam's father, Dr. Thomas Thompson, thinks Sam was born in Egypt; however, his mother, Dr. Dorothy Irvin, "does not agree to this theory," says Sam. According to Sam no one is sure about where he is from because his parents told him an unidentified person brought him to the adoption agency in Lebanon when he was an infant.

Dr. Thomas and Dr. Irvin were working towards their doctoral degrees in theology by way of archaeological studies when they adopted Sam and his 17-year-old sister, Hilary.

"Most people don't think I'm white," says Sam with grin. "They usually ask me where I'm from or what is my ethnic background."

Sam considers himself Middle Eastern and checks "other" on applications and other forms.

He says he's never tried to look for his parents. "I don't see were I'd be getting anything out of it. I am basically content with life here and my parents."

When he was in the fifth grade Sam's parents divorced, and he moved with his mother and sister to Durham from Twin Cities, Minnesota. His mother and sister, Hilary, still live in Durham.

Sam's career goal is to be a rehabilitation counselor for people who have suffered a tragedy. He would also like to work with small children who suffer from birth defects or have lost limbs.

"I want to be able to help other people solve and deal with their problems," he says, "whether they are emotional or physical. I think my biggest reason for my desire to be a rehabilitation counselor is that I believe children with missing limbs or birth defects need to be able to look up to and relate to someone who can help them."

"I think they can be helped a lot by someone who really knows what they're going through. There are things that I can teach them or talk to them about that most doctors don't know a thing about, no matter how long they've been in the field."

Al Johnson's two dreams: Coaching, finishing college

By Rodney Moore

While he was the head coach at Germantown Friends High School in Philadelphia, ECSU's new assistant basketball coach, Alfred Johnson, always stressed the necessity of excelling academically.

He helped get athletic scholarships for five players to teams such as Villanova, Brown and Howard, all within five years of being head coach.

At Germantown, Johnson's seven senior basketball players had a combined SAT average of 1152. Combined with a 75% winning average over his coaching career, it would seem that Alfred Johnson would be the perfect assistant or head coach for any team in the college ranks. But time after time Johnson was turned down for coaching positions on the

college level, even though he had the backing of big-time coaches such as Rollie Massamino of Villanova and John Chaney of Temple.

What was it that kept this obviously great coach out of college coaching? Alfred Johnson never finished college.

"I remember I was up for the coaching job at Alfred University and everything was in the works for me to get the job," said Johnson. "When I first asked them about going back to school while coaching their reply was, 'that would be fine for you to pursue your masters while you coach.' But when I told them that it was my undergraduate degree that I was seeking, their whole attitude changed."

Johnson's problems began when he graduated from Germantown Friends High School as a basketball star. He received a scholarship to play

basketball at Christopher-Newport College in Newport News, Virginia. Johnson played basketball for three years, excelling athletically and socially but neglecting academics, with the complicity of his professors.

Johnson's attitude changed after his close friend Tim Claxton, a signee of the Atlanta Hawks, died suddenly of a rare heart disease.

Claxton's death caused Johnson to look at basketball in a different light. Basketball was no longer a sport for the invincible; it had lost its luster and now was "just another thing."

Deciding that basketball was not worth the effort anymore, Johnson quit the team in 1981.

"All of a sudden professors started cracking down on me after I had quit the team," said Johnson. "I had fooled around in classes and the professors didn't care. But as soon as I quit, it was

a new kind of ball game." As a result Johnson was academically suspended from Christopher-Newport.

Basketball was no longer a part of Johnson's life, even though there were offers to play professional basketball overseas. He moved back to Pennsylvania, where he got married in 1986.

He got a job managing a computer store. He was making a lot of money, but was not completely happy. He wanted to coach, which meant he had to get his degree.

"My family had always stressed education and I felt like I needed to finish my education," he said.

Johnson searched for a coaching job that would allow him to coach while completing his education.

"There were a couple of offers from predominantly white colleges, but they were just giving me lip-services. They wanted me to help recruit some play-

ers to the schools before they would give me a job."

During Johnson's search, he received a call from ECSU Coach Claude Mackey. Mackey wanted Johnson's help in recruiting players in the Philadelphia area.

"Mackey wanted to know why I didn't have a coaching job, so I told him about my situation," said Johnson. Mackey, impressed by his background, conferred with Chancellor Jenkins about giving Johnson a job.

"Coach Mackey gave me the opportunity here to do what I love, which is coaching and continuing my education at the same time," said Johnson. "He believed in my coaching abilities first and foremost and in what I could do for him as a coach instead of what I could give him up front (players)."

"I am very grateful to Coach Mackey and Chancellor Jenkins. My

goal is to be a head coach, and I need a degree to get into the door. Coach Mackey and Dr. Jenkins are helping me through that door."

Johnson's advice to potential college or pro basketball players?

"I would tell them that basketball is a vehicle that will take you to a higher level and that level is education. No matter how good you are, it can all be taken away in less than a second."

"I knew a young man who had a great future ahead of him at the University of Kansas playing basketball. One day he and a couple of friends were trying to beat a train across the tracks and they didn't make it. Subsequently his foot had to be amputated, so he was left with no further opportunity at Kansas. So you see after you can't play ball anymore all you have left is what is in your head."