

# ECSU's Nate Higgs: *A rising star who keeps his feet on the ground*

Photo by Jamie Jordan

When some people think of athletes, they think of dumb jocks. But that thought will never enter your mind when you spend an evening watching the Charlotte Hornets defeat the Orlando Magic with ECSU's basketball star, Nathan Higgs, Jr.

On the screen victorious Charlotte fans shouting "Hoops, there it is!" remind Higgs of a revved-up ECSU crowd shouting, "Shoot the ball, Nate!" as the 23-year-old senior goes up for the dunk.

"It's good to hear the crowd cheering," says Higgs, "but I try to block them out because you have to concentrate on the court. When I am out on the court, I'm aggressive. I play to win. I've wanted to play pro ball ever since I was a kid."

Higgs, a native of Tarboro, N.C., has been playing organized basketball for the past six years. The 6' 7" senior averages 23 points a game.

It is no secret that Higgs has been a likely candidate to play professional basketball since his sophomore year. Observers say Higgs is one of the best players in the CIAA.

"Nate is just one of the best players," says Reg Worlds, sports editor of *The Compass*. "He can do it all—shoot, rebound, play defense."

Higgs attended a couple of pro-ball camps this past summer, where pros evaluate talent for professional players. Playing with professional players from the Boston Celtics and the New York Knicks taught him that "you have to be tough to play in the league, especially the NBA."

Although Higgs hopes to go pro he is level-headed enough to understand that even though basketball may be his ticket to success, a good education is also important. And if his pro hopes don't materialize, he has other dreams, other irons in the fire.

"If basketball doesn't work out, I'm going to have to work somewhere. There are a lot of things I can do. I eventually want to go on to grad school."

Long term plans also include teaching and coaching. "I'll probably end up teaching your kids one day," he says with a laugh.

Higgs, who promised his mom "I was going to come home with a degree," is double majoring in sociology and social science with a concentration in history. Higgs attributes his aspiration to become a professional basketball player to his parents who have encouraged him to work hard, and be successful in life.

"My hero is not an athlete, it's my father," he says. "My parents taught me right from wrong. It's carried me a long



Nate Higgs, ECSU's star basketball player, a likely pro prospect after graduation.

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Nate Higgs

way. I learned a lot from my dad. He has always been there for me."

Higgs' parents taught him that "you get out of something what you have put into it."

Higgs feels basketball is his "second chance at life." It kept him off the streets and gave him the opportunity to go to college. "I've been through hell, seems like, but I'm still here," he says. "I'm a warrior. I can survive."

Higgs, whose pet peeve is "petty gossip," admits that people sometimes make assumptions about him because of his skill and talent on the court.

"People will look at me and because of basketball, they already think I'm a big-headed person. They think I'm mean, but they don't know me. When they say petty stuff, I let it go over my head. I want people to respect me and what I work for. I work hard for everything I've accomplished in life and in school. I don't take anything from anybody who works hard. I respect them."

Although his dad is his role model Higgs feels he has two qualities in common with retired Chicago Bull star, Michael Jordan: "I'm aggressive and I'm a

competitor," says Higgs, adding that he hopes he'll one day get an opportunity to play with the Chicago Bulls. "They play my style of ball."

Higgs says his most embarrassing moments are when he misses open dunks.

"When I saw Jordon miss one, it was all right," he adds.

When Higgs is not on the basketball court or in class he's in his room playing Sega. You also might even find him walking around campus with his headphones on, bobbing his head to his favorite tunes. He likes jazz, soul, R & B, rap as well as "older music" by Marvin Gaye and Al Green. Music is an important part of Nate Higgs' life.

"Music teaches me a lot," he says. "It keeps me going, picks me up, helps me go to sleep, and motivates me before the game."

On a warm day, you may even see Higgs on his way to his favorite fishing spot with his fishing rod and bait. "Fishing helps clear my mind," he says.

Higgs has been working with the National Youth Sports Program for the past two summers. He hopes basketball will allow him to achieve a variety of his

goals. Even if he doesn't play professionally, he's not going to give up on his ambitions. Although his eyes may be on the stars, he keeps his feet on the ground when he looks at the big picture of his life. He realizes that today's winner can be tomorrow's forgotten man.

"Basketball can take you just a little distance but it won't take you all the way. My basketball career could end at any time."

Higgs believes strongly in African Americans owning their own businesses. He says blacks need to help one another instead of back stabbing.

"We as black people are far behind in the world. We're not where we're supposed to be. If we pull together and give our 110 percent, we'd be further up the scale. We can't be content with what little success we have. We have to get past the stereotypes and jump at every opportunity that we may have."

Higgs says he feels pretty good about the upcoming season.

"We're strong on defense this year. As long as we as a team respect each other's abilities and as men, we'll be all right."

Higgs says he has great respect for his teammates, along with Coach Mackey, and assistant Coach Alfred Johnson. And he appreciates the advantages of playing at a small school like ECSU where you "get more personal attention."

Higgs, who admits that teams from smaller schools don't get the same respect as the larger ones, is quick to add that he is happy at ECSU and never thought about transferring. He is especially pleased with the personal relationships he has formed.

"I'm learning about my own culture," he says. "Being here helps me to find out about us. When I go to a white school, I can handle myself."

Higgs admits that ECSU has some drawbacks, including "lack of exposure, everybody being in your business, and the fact that the school is located in a small place." Despite these drawbacks Higgs has nothing but praise for his teammates, coaches and the ECSU basketball program. "The basketball program has come a long way in the five years I've been here."

Given his idealism and his pragmatism, Higgs can't settle for second best when it comes to the woman in his life.

"My ideal woman can stand on her own feet," he says. "She is willing to work hard at life, and she wants something out of it. She will be serious, but still have fun, too."

Higgs wants someone "who likes me for who I am and not what I do."