

SPORTS

The Final Destination

Men's and women's basketball head to Charleston for the weekend to claim the ultimate prize in sports. See story p. 22

Sports Picks

Our "experts" pit their knowledge against each other in week four. See story p. 23

Montell Watson: A dream accomplished

Mike Vivenzio

Reporter

He walks around campus with his SoCon backpack strapped to his back and the hood of his jacket up. He is quiet, but at the same time his presence cannot go unnoticed. Everyone knows who he is and he will stop and talk to everyone who says "hi." When you talk to him, you would think you have been best friends since early childhood.

Montell Watson has come a long way since playing on the basket his dad put up on their long driveway in Clifton Forge, Va. Watson is from a small town, right on the border of West Virginia and is the only child of Angela and Todd Watson. The two people who were most influential in his life.

"I definitely had a great childhood," Watson said. "My parents worked hard for everything and really took care of the family. I never had a need or want for anything."

Watson's childhood was quiet, except for basketball.

"A lot of the things I remember growing up relate to basketball," Watson said.

The street Watson grew up on was comprised mostly of older boys, generally two or three years older than Watson, forcing him to earn his keep on the court.

"At one point, they were better than me," Watson said. "They were physically stronger, but I always wanted to play with them."

Watson laughs and smiles as he recalls times as a child when he would play basketball by himself and imagine that he was on a college

basketball team playing in a big game. "I never dreamed I would actually do it," Watson said.

When Watson was nine years-old, his dad would take him out to the basketball court, blindfold him and make him dribble to improve his ball-handling skills.

"He always told me that you only get out of it what you put into it - there is always someone better than you out there, so you have to do what it takes to get to that level," Watson said. "My dad definitely influenced my life the most, in basketball and in general, he was always so wise, he gave me my drive."

It was that drive that propelled Watson in high school. He started on varsity all four years at Alleghany High School in Virginia, earning All-State honorable mention his sophomore year, first team All-State his junior and senior years, and Division I-AA State Player of the Year his senior year.

"There were times that I would want to be inside playing video games but I would always think that someone was out there playing and that I should be, too," Watson said.

But forget the accolades, because without winning, they mean nothing to Watson. If you ask him his favorite high school basketball memory he will not tell you any of the individual awards, he will not mention how he averaged over 24 points per game in high school or how he scored 28 points in his final high school game. What he will tell you is how he helped his team reach the state tournament and advance to the semi-finals for the first time since the early 1980s.

Watson has helped bring a rejuvenated feeling about basketball to Elon University.

"The biggest thing about Elon and why I came here is they were the first to really recruit me," Watson said. "They treated me as if I was number one priority from the beginning."

Watson credits former assistant basketball coach Tim Fuller as his biggest influence in attending Elon.

"Coach Fuller treated me like a son the entire time and he let me know that Coach Nestor would challenge me," Watson said.

Since joining the Phoenix, Watson has led the team in three-point percentage and has stepped up to be the leader of the team both on and off the court. On the court, he controls the tempo and always remembers the words of his father.

"It's a feel thing, especially as a point guard," Watson said. "The first thing you have to notice is what defense the other team is running, you have to be able to recognize and read the court quickly. It's almost like a chess match, I am constantly thinking about what play I should call and what the best move to make in any given situation is."

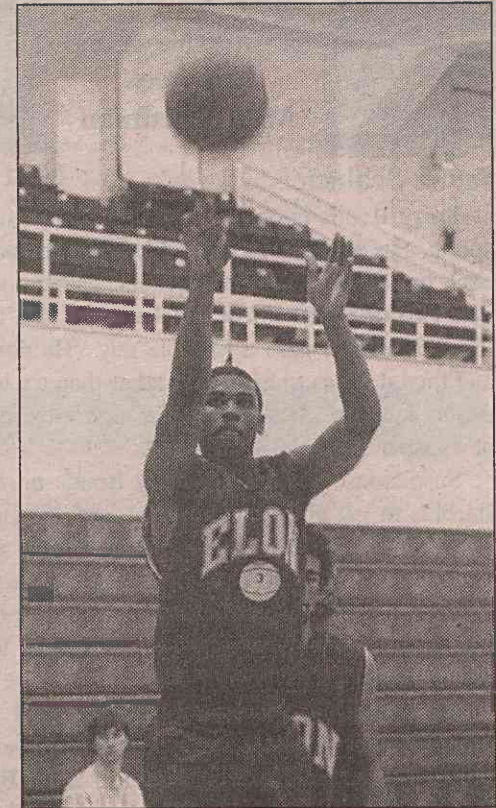
Watson's biggest moment for the Phoenix came this year on Jan. 23, when Elon played host to the Furman Paladins. The game was close the entire time and then Watson took over, scoring 12 straight points to propel the Phoenix to an 81-77 overtime victory.

"That game is unexplainable," Watson said, with a big smile on his face as he recreates the moves he made. "I don't even know what happened, that was a true zone, it's like I blacked out. I don't even remember it. I had no fears, no one had a chance."

While it seems that Watson has a good "feel" for the game, that is the one thing that he has always said that he needs to improve on and the one aspect of his game that he feels has improved the most since his freshman year.

If you asked him what his weakness is now, he would simply reply, "my mid-range game." Watson has taken great strides to improve that area, shooting more than 300 jump shots a day during the off-season.

While questions about his game are easy to answer, when you ask Watson his biggest weakness as a person, the answers do not come as quick. Watson sits back on the couch, seemingly searching for an answer. While his demeanor is confident, his tan Timberlands are in perfect condition, not a stain on his jeans and



Matt Gannon/ Photo Editor
Shooting 300 shots a day during the off-season has helped Watson become one of Elon's premier players.

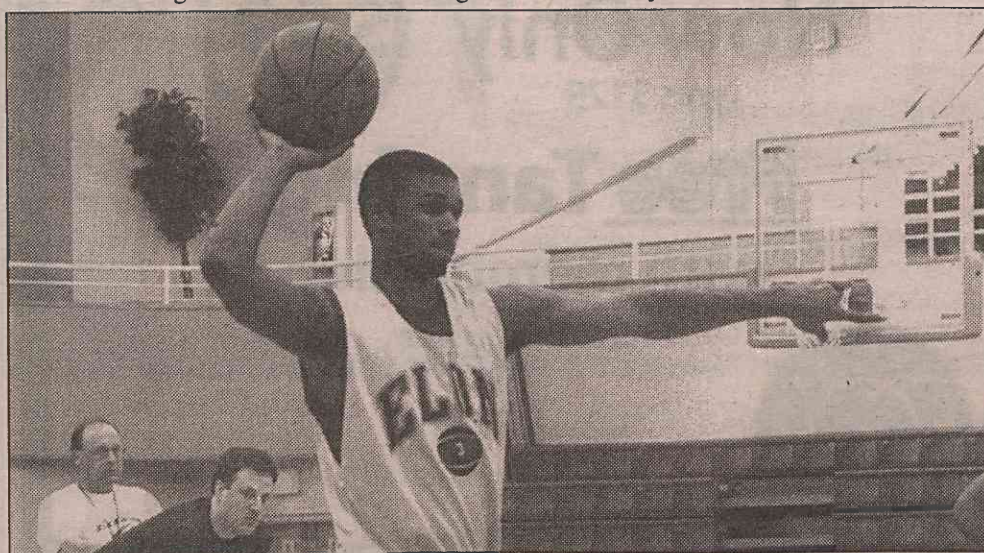
his gold chain with a fairly decent-sized depiction of Jesus Christ dangling from the end of it hangs from his neck, Watson is in deep thought. He finally replies, "I am too trusting. A lot of times I tend to trust people too much, too fast, before I really get the chance to know them." That is just who Watson is as a person, always positive, always ready to lend a hand.

"That how I would describe myself: positive," Watson said. "I am always trying to take the best out of a situation no matter what. With a negative attitude, negative things will happen. That's the way I try to live my life and that's the way I play basketball."

As the great coach Jim Valvano once said, "How do you go from where you are to where you want to be? I think you have to have an enthusiasm for life. You have to have a dream, a goal and, you have to be willing to work for it."

Montell Watson has had a dream, he has tried to achieve his goals and he has worked hard every step of the way.

Contact Mike Vivenzio at pendulum@elon.edu or 278-7247.



Matt Gannon/ Photo Editor

Watson has been injured since Jan. 23 but hopes to return for the SoCon tournament.