

AAU State Finals Profile

Webster Rediscovered Lost Confidence

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Chronicle Sports Writer



Derrick Webster

Derrick Webster knew he was struggling. So it came as no surprise when coach Reggie Williams took away his starting job on the Winston Lake 12-under AAU team.

"I was making some mistakes on the court, rushing myself. So I don't blame the coach for not starting me some games," he said. "Now I've been trying hard in practice to win back my starting job back."

Webster, a point guard on the Lakers squad, figures to be a key contributor as Winston Lake plays in the state finals in Concord this weekend. For the 12-year-old, playing well would be a great way to make a strong comeback into the starting lineup.

At the start of the year, Webster was a starter. As one of six holdovers from last year's team that reached the state semifinals, he figured the job would be his to lose. Unfortunately, it was.

Webster had to adjust to a new coach in Williams and a new offensive system to run. During the first three games, the point guard had difficulty with the various schemes and picked up his dribble at the most inopportune times. Naturally, his uncertainty extended to his outside shooting.

"When I got into the game, I wasn't calm enough to run the play," Webster said. "My jumper was a little flat because I wasn't getting enough arc on my shot. I think that was because my confidence was down."

It was during the Greensboro Invitational that Williams took his struggling guard aside and sat him on the bench. Both the player and the coach agree it was probably the best move for Webster at the time.

"At that time, Derrick was not

the quiet-by-nature point guard has shown more of a take-charge attitude on the floor. Webster calls the right plays and sets ups during the games. Winston Lake assistant coach Jack Jackson has noticed an improvement in Webster's game and has noticed an inner confidence in the guard.

"He had a rope in his hand one day after practice and I asked him has he been jumping rope. He said, 'Yeah.' I also asked him has he been working on his ball handling and his dribbling, and he said 'Yeah,'" Jackson said.

"When basketball players start, they kind of take their positions for granted without working hard, and I think that's what happened to Derrick," Jackson said. When his playing time diminished, he started working out on his own. Now you see the improvement in his game and you can see the confidence in his face."

Williams has also noticed Webster's improvement across the board and is certain his young guard will be back in the starting lineup again. What Williams never questioned was Webster's effort.

"The bigger the game is, the bigger he plays. When the game is tight, he plays that much better," he said. "Derrick's grown a lot in the last seven-and-a-half weeks. He's concentrating on doing the right things on the court instead of forcing things."

Now Webster is ready for this weekend. And he feels he's a much better player for going to the bench.

"I've been working hard the past few weeks trying to get back in the starting lineup, but now I want to go to the nationals," Webster said. "I just have to go in and do my part and do the things I have to for us to win."

used to that level of competition running the plays we wanted to run, plus we had to rotate eight guards in and out of our rotation," Williams said. "He also had to get adjusted to the coaches. The players were not used to being pushed as hard and I would send my assistant coaches behind me to make sure their confidence wasn't shaken."

Instead of sulking about coming off the bench, Webster went out and did something about his situation. On days when the team did not practice, he would be at either Polo Park or Speas Elementary practicing on his game. His regimen would include shooting free throws, jumping rope, and conditioning drills. Webster also worked on a drill that improved his ball handling skills by dribbling with two balls whenever he had a chance.

Webster also credits his older brother, Daniel, with helping him to relax.

"He would tell me to take my time, not to panic and rush myself," he said. "He said to pretend that you're at home playing in your backyard playing one-on-one."

Instead of being timid when he enters the game, Williams noticed

Sims Center

"When I was growing up, my father used to take me to Memorial Stadium and watch the Baltimore Orioles play. It's also good for the kids to see some other things besides the negative images in the projects."

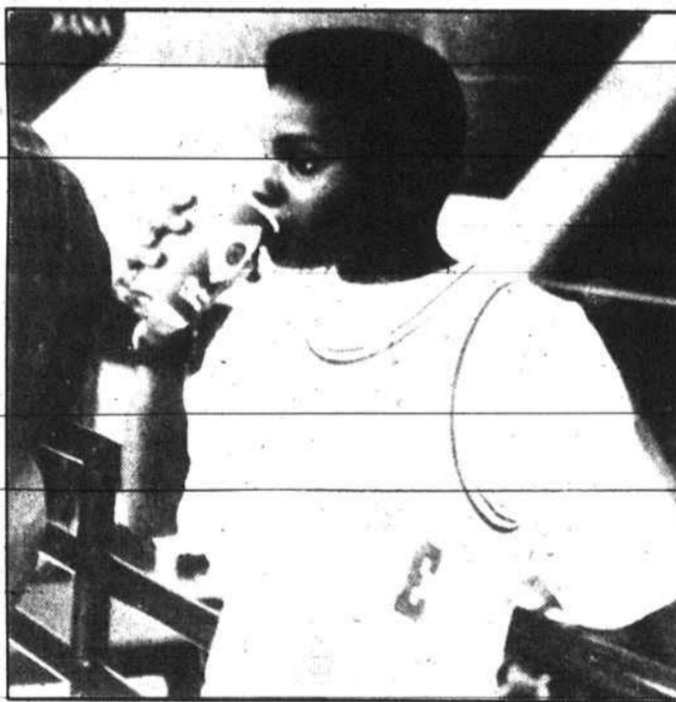
As the youngsters looked around the Coliseum, some were amazed at the vendors and people at the game. Despite sitting in the top tier, most youngsters commented on how great the view was.

"When I saw the Coliseum, I was expecting it to be noisy and have a terrible view," 14-year-old Gary Henderson said. "But I've enjoyed it a lot more than I thought I would. Plus the game was great."

Lost to the youths was how hard it was to get tickets to the game on a short notice. The Hornets are

one of the NBA's biggest draws and each game at the Coliseum has been a sellout in the six-year existence of the franchise. But Lithomas Graham said the game will always be special to him.

"It was the best time I had, and seeing a basketball game up front is real special," said Lithomas, 12. "It's much more exciting seeing the players close up, plus seeing Scottie Pippen and B.J. (Armstrong) in person was special."



Gary Henderson relaxes during halftime Friday.

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Duncan

the coaches believed in me and I played my best."

Duncan's development gave the Demon Deacons an added inside player alongside forward Trelonnie Owens and took some of the pressure off guard Randolph Childress. Duncan capped off his inaugural year with 16-point, 15-rebound effort against Kansas in the second round of the NCAA Tournament.

Duncan said he misses the pace of life that exist in St. Croix. While at home, he said things were taken on a day-to-day basis, whereas life here is more hectic. It was back home where his brother-in-law taught him how to play the game.

"Everybody my age was a little bit shorter than I was, so I had to play with the older guys," said Duncan, who grew nine inches in three years. "My coordination was a little off, so I concentrated on playing defense and running down the court, the basic things. He really helped me out a lot in learning how to post up, how to score."

Where he is from, things such as coats are as rare as a bad Caribbean day in July.

Imagine his surprise when he went to Alaska in December when the Demon Deacons played in the Great Alaska Shootout.

"That was something to get used to, the cold weather, because I'm used to wearing shorts, tank

tops and T-shirts," Duncan said with a laugh. "It was the first time I ever saw snowflakes and I also had to get used to the nights. When you got up at 9:30, the sun wouldn't come for another hour. Then it would go down at 3 or 4 o'clock."

Naturally, Duncan did succumb to the elements and got some thicker clothing. And he also did some adjusting on the court. His first time around the league, Duncan did not realize how much stronger the players would be. But during the second half of the conference schedule, Duncan felt his once-unsure confidence soared with his play.

"Playing in this tough of a conference, with the great players they have, can wear on you, so there were some tough times," he said. "But there were some fun times as well. The lack of experience I had, not knowing what to do when I was in the game, hurt me somewhat, but

I came in and played hard when I was in."

Duncan did note that the people in the United States are more open with their feelings and are more expressive. It's just one of the many things that Duncan likes about being over here.

Despite the long distance, Duncan has kept in touch with his family on a weekly basis and visited one of his two sisters, who attends Swarthmore (Pa.) College. As a special surprise, the Duncan family came to see him play live in the ACC Tournament in Charlotte.

But now he's ready to get home and see his father and two sisters.

"Most students say they are ready to go home, but they don't realize that home for them is different from home for me," he said. "Their homes are here while mine is much further away. When I get home, I'm just going to do the things I used to do."

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