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Hoop dreams

Love for the game of basketball has guided teachers Corby Schuh and Darrell Walker out of rec leagues and into the International Basketball League

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Corby Schuh and Darrell Walker were once teammates on the Everett Community College men's basketball team. They also played together as members of the three-time defending champions of the annual I-5 Extravaganza 3-on-3 tournament. And they both teach in the Marysville School District, where Schuh and Walker play early-morning basketball three times a week.

Beginning today, that bond will extend to the least probable description of all.

Schuh and Walker are professional basketball players, thanks to the International Basketball League's expansion to Everett.

When the Everett Explosion of the IBL opens training camp today, the roster will be filled with young, hopeful players and experienced minor-league veterans. The 28-year-old Schuh and Walker, 30, fit into neither category.

"I'm just playing for the love of the game," said Schuh, a 6-foot-5 rookie from Central Washington University by way of EvCC. "I made the team, so I might as well stick with it.

"Am I going to play in the NBA? There's a one in 300 million chance that anyone will play in the NBA. It's just the love of the game and the opportunity to be part of a team again."

Schuh, a native of Odessa in Eastern Washington, played his last organized basketball game almost seven years ago. When his CWU team saw its season end in March of 2000, he was pretty certain that his playing career was over. His head coach, Greg Sparling, made some phone calls about the possibility of Schuh playing in Australia, but nothing transpired.

"That's one of the hardest things: when the game's over, it's over," Schuh said. "After I hadn't heard from (any teams in) Australia for a couple weeks, I just figured my basketball career was over. It was hard to swallow."

Now, seven years later, he's got a second lease on his basketball life.

Schuh and Walker tried out together when the Explosion held open tryouts at EvCC in the fall. Both were eventually offered contracts, which makes the opportunity even more fulfilling.

"I don't know if I'd really want to do it without him," said Schuh, a math teacher at Marysville Junior High School. "I mean, now that I know the rest of the team, I get along with everyone; they're great guys. But I'm not sure I would have tried out if (Walker) wasn't around."

Walker is around EvCC a lot, serving as co-head coach of the men's basketball team along with his father, Larry. He also teaches physical education at Marysville Middle School, then heads over to EvCC to help run practices.

As if Walker's school year isn't busy enough, now he'll try to fit in the IBL.

"It's always been a busy season for me, but my wife knew what she was getting into. She's a trooper," said Walker, who will add another task in May with the birth of his first child. "Everyone asks me: 'Your plate is so full, how will you find time to do something else?'

"... (The Explosion coaches) were pretty understanding when I went in to sign the contract. I told them that my family takes precedent. It'll work out."

Despite his age and modest 6-foot frame, Walker isn't expecting to join the Explosion as a little-used bench player. He said he's looking at himself as the team's starting point guard, until someone takes that job away from him.

"I've always taken a backseat because I'm the short, white guy. But this is my opportunity," said Walker, who graduated from Marysville-Pilchuck High school in 1994 before playing at EvCC, Eastern Washington University and Seattle Pacific. "I told (owner) Nathan (Mumm) that if I'm going to do this, I want to make it worth my while.

"I'm excited. I look at it like, it's my job to lose. I'm going to step up to the challenge."

Walker knows that his Snohomish County roots were part of the reason he was signed - "I get calls every day from people wanting to get tickets," he said - and he's embracing the role of local favorite.

"I'm looking at the opportunity as a stepping stone for what I want to do in the community," he said. "I want to do some camps. I really, really want to attack the community and get kids involved."

Despite his professional inexperience and relative lack of youth, Walker is happy just to be involved with organized basketball again.

"It's in my blood," he said. "I wouldn't have it any other way."

Nor would Schuh.

"It's great. I love it," he said. "You can go out and play in the rec league, but it's just not the same."

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