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## Passion to help others

**Donald Watts, the former Husky standout now playing for the Everett Explosion, looks to pass on his basketball experiences to another generation of athletes.**

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EVERETT - Donald Watts wants you to remember the famous lineage, the friendly smile, the trip to the Sweet 16.

But there are also things he doesn't want you to associate with him or his playing career.

The high expectations and tough love of a high-profile father.

The myriad of injuries. The battle with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome.

The NBA dreams that came crashing back to reality.

As one of the most famous players in University of Washington basketball history prepares to embark on another new season with another new franchise, he does so with an asterisk of sorts.

The Donald Watts that will play with the Everett Explosion in the expansion team's International Basketball League debut tonight is not necessarily the same Donald Watts you might remember from the UW.

The smile and soft shooting touch are still there, for sure. But deep down, there are elements of Watts that have been - much like his professional basketball career - left outside the limelight.

The untold story begins when he was just a child, starting out in a sport where his father excelled.

Donald Watts Sr., who was better known as "Slick" and immediately recognized by the headband on his shaven scalp, played 4 1/2 seasons with the Seattle SuperSonics, winning an NBA title along the way. Yet Donald Jr. struggled with the sport early on.

"I was clumsy, big feet, not really good at the game," Donald Watts Jr. said during a phone conversation earlier this week. "I remember getting into the car after a practice, and (my father) said: 'I'd better call your mama and clear something up; you don't play like my son.'"

Donald Jr. calls his dad "a tough father," but maintained a close relationship with him and learned to appreciate the constant motivation.

By the time he was in eighth grade, following a breakout performance on the court, Donald Jr. earned the best compliment his father could give him.

"I had a good game, and he said: 'You played like a Watts,'" Donald recalled. "That was big for me. I felt like I'd arrived."

Watts continued to make his father proud, going on to successful careers at Lake Washington High School and the UW. During his college career, he led the Huskies to the Sweet 16 appearance and finished as Washington's 18th-leading all-time scorer. The Milwaukee Bucks made him a second-round pick in the 1999 NBA draft.

But his NBA career never panned out for a variety of reasons, most of which were related to health. He suffered a myriad of injuries while participating in NBA camps or playing overseas and was eventually cast aside in favor of the next crop of young shooters.

Along the way, Watts struggled to keep his energy up. He finally sought out help in 2000, when he was diagnosed with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS). Having used acupuncture and homeopathic medicine to get the condition under control, Watts now says that CFS affected him all the way back to his college days.

"I was cramping up, losing power, all that stuff," Watts said. "It really impacts your quality of life."

While the CFS no longer affects him on the court, injuries have continued to dog him. Watts was held out of several Explosion practices due to foot problems that stem from inflammation in the joints of multiple toes on both feet. He said that condition is a byproduct of his most recent season in Europe.

"Over there," he said, "they practice three to four hours a day, six days a week. That takes a toll."

Now 31, Watts no longer dreams big or ponders the possibility of an NBA future.

"The NBA would be great, but at the same time it's not the ultimate goal in life for me," Watts said. "My goal is to be a good man, a good father."

There are moments when Watts sounds like he's talking about his basketball career as if it's a thing of the past.

"I've had opportunities to play with some of the best basketball players of all-time," he said. "I've been coached by Tiny Archibald, shot around with Dennis Johnson and Downtown Freddie Brown. I worked out with Kobe Bryant for a week. I've been out on the court with Magic Johnson.

"My basketball experience has been so rich and plentiful. I have no regrets. It's been an awesome experience, and I'll continue to play as long as I can continue to play."

Watts' basketball goal is to take those experiences and pass them along to another generation of athletes. He holds several youth basketball camps. He wants to coach the sport one day.

He wants to bring out the best in others, just like his father did for him.

"That's one of the good things he gave to me that I didn't realize," Watts said. "It's just a passion to help others. Whenever somebody has a dream, and someone helps you along the way, it's like an angel from above.

"That's the legacy I want to leave, to feel good about the work I've done."

He's already taken a special liking to one up-and-coming basketball player. Meadowdale High School senior Milan Moncrief, who led the Mavericks in scoring but has not gotten much interest from Division I colleges, has been under Watts' tutelage since the end of the high school season. They work out together three times a week with the hopes that Moncrief can eventually earn a college basketball scholarship.

"I've already seen a change in my game in the last month of working out with him," Moncrief said Friday while with Watts in Las Vegas to attend a tournament for unsigned high school seniors. "It's my court sense, finding open spots on the floor and knocking down open shots."

Watts has another budding project as well. Isaiah Watts, one of Donald's two 2-year-old children, already has taken to basketball.

"My son is a 2 1/2-year-old fanatic," Watts said. "He's already hanging out with Papa (grandfather Slick) at the gym. I came home from Europe, and he hit six or seven in a row on his little basket. I'm like, where did that come from?"

Unlike those parents who promise not to push their children, Watts admits that he'll probably treat Isaiah just like Slick treated him.

"As a family, it's the easiest thing for us to teach," Watts said. "He's got it in his blood. I'll just ask him the same thing my dad asked me: Do you want to be good, and how good do you want to be?"

Donald Watts Jr. wanted to be as good as his father. And even though he didn't make it that far, he's content with the way his basketball career has gone.

"I'm a second-generation basketball player, so I'm OK with not making it," he said. "My dad played and had success, and yet he has been successful and happy outside of the NBA."

"Some people don't make it in basketball, then they have nothing. I've learned that when you go after something, you go after it with all you've got; but when it's gone, you move on and don't look back."

The IBL has afforded Donald Watts a chance to do both.

He's still playing basketball, but he's also able to look back.