

Handful of locals help to shape Chargers

By Adam Jude

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In two weeks of practice with the Eugene Chargers, Josh Harbert showcased an unrivaled hustle and determination to prove himself to his coach and teammates.

Kenya Wilkins said the local product will quickly endear himself to those in the stands as well.

"I think the fans will really like Josh," said Wilkins, coach of the Chargers, an International Basketball League expansion team. "He'll give you all that he has on every possession."

Harbert, a standout at Marist High and Northwest Christian College, has a chance to enhance his hometown résumé - and fan base - with Eugene's semi-pro basketball team. And he'll do it on the court he's called home for the past two years.

Harbert will be among the few Chargers with local ties when Eugene begins its inaugural season against Salem at 7:15 p.m. Friday at NCC's Morse Event Center.

"Hopefully we'll pack the house at NCC," said Harbert, a 6-foot-4 guard who was the Beacons' senior captain last season. "I'm definitely excited about playing at NCC. I feel I have a slight edge there."

Harbert helped Marist win the 2001 Class 3A state championship, and after two years at Southern Oregon he returned to Eugene to play at NCC.

"Josh is doing a phenomenal job," Wilkins said. "He's a player that you like to coach. If you tell him to set a screen, it doesn't matter if the guy's 7-7, he'll set the screen."

Harbert's effort hasn't gone unnoticed by teammates.

"I love Josh's game," said Bonell Colas, a 6-9 center from the University of Florida. "He's a real heady player and he knows what he needs to be on the court."

Travis Melvin, a sharpshooting guard from Pleasant Hill who played for George Fox University, joined the team last week.

Two former Oregon players could also be in uniform this season.

Jay Anderson has signed with the Chargers but won't return to Eugene until April 19, after he finishes his commitment with a team in Germany. Matt Short, a 7-foot center who completed his eligibility with the Ducks this season, worked out with the Chargers this week and is considering playing.

Seven of the 13 players on the Chargers' roster attended a Division I college, with most arriving in town within the past two weeks.

Practices have been spirited, with the new teammates quick to offer praise and high-fives after a good play - even if they don't know one another's names yet.

"There's a lot of energy and enthusiasm," Harbert said. "Everyone is still trying to get to know each other. There are definitely a lot of positive attitudes, which is nice to see because with so many new faces it could easily go the other way."

Colas has shown the most flair since arriving last week, attempting an array of acrobatic dunks and displaying a playful personality.

"I really feel good about this team," said Colas, a Miami native sporting Florida shorts the day after his former team won the national championship. "The IBL will be a good league to showcase our talent."

A handful of Chargers scouted Salem in its first home game last week, when the Stampede defeated Central Oregon 134-111.

Grayson Boucher - aka "The Professor" - is a reserve for the Stampede. Boucher, a 5-10, 155-pound point guard from Keizer, has gained national acclaim for his ballhandling skills on the And 1 streetball tour. Last summer, he appeared with And 1 teammates on the cover of Sports Illustrated.

IBL rules follow NBA standards, with a few exceptions. To encourage nonstop action, the IBL has a 22-second shot clock and teams are allowed one timeout per quarter. Inbounds plays are to be made immediately and players are allowed just five fouls.

The Chargers play a 20-game regular-season schedule, with their second game scheduled for April 14 at home against Central Oregon. Tickets are \$6 for adults, \$3 for students. Children 12 and younger are free.

"We've made a lot of strides the last couple weeks," Wilkins said. "We're a different team than we were when we started, and it's encouraging. It gives me a glimpse of the team I see in my head."

MEET THE CHARGERS

1, Akin Hughes (PG, 6-2, Florida International/ Voorhees): Played professionally in Venezuela and CBA.

2, Travis Melvin (G, 6-2, George Fox): Former Pleasant Hill High standout led George Fox in scoring and steals.

3, Doug Lamb (G, 6-2, Alaska-Anchorage/Western Oregon): Averaged 8.7 ppg, 3.3 rpg and 3.5 apg for IBL's Central Oregon Hotshots last season.

4, Jahmez Dixon (G, 6-3, Western Oregon): Played for Central Oregon Hotshots last season in first pro stint.

5, Josh Harbert (G, 6-4, Southern Oregon/Northwest Christian): Eugene native led Beacons in scoring, rebounding and assists. Helped Marist High to state title in 2001.

6, JR Patrick (G, 6-5, Santa Clara): Averaged 19.2 ppg for pro team in France. Also played with Canadian national team.

7, Damon King (G, 6-4, Weber State): Touted scorer returned from team in Germany to average 27 points in two games with IBL's Vancouver Volcanoes in 2005.

8, Jay Anderson (C, 6-9, Oregon): Played in all 31 games, including seven starts, for the Ducks as a senior in 2003-04, averaging 2.6 ppg and 2.2 rbg.

9, Elliott Marshall (F, 6-5, San Jose State/Oregon Tech): Honorable mention NAIA all-America selection for Oregon Tech as a junior in 2000-01.

15, Ethnie Stubbs (F, 6-6, Saint Mary's): Played on Bahamas national team for three years and in Portugal for two. Averaged 11 ppg and 5 rpg for Central Oregon last year.

20, Michael Harper (C, 6-9, Florida A&M/ UNC-Asheville): First-year pro averaged 9.6 ppg and 4.8 rpg for Rattlers in '03-04.

21, Antwon Mills (F, 6-8, Fresno Pacific): Stints with USBL, ABA, TPBL and Harlem Globetrotters.

36, Bonell "Bo" Colas (C, 6-9, Florida): Played in four NCAA Tournaments for Gators, averaging 4.9 ppg and 3.1 rpg in final season in '03-04.