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Local

UNC star wows campers at Conestoga

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,BERWYN -- For a few minutes inside the basketball gym at Conestoga High School, the constant chatter and chorus of sneaker squeaks generated by more than 100 kids slowly subsided.

Instead, it was replaced by hushed whispers and an air of impending excitement.

"Where's Tyler?" a few kids asked.

"Can I be the first to get his autograph?" another chirped.

"I'm the biggest North Carolina fan here," one boasted, before calling a friend the worst name of all -- a Duke fan.

Just then, college basketball's biggest star came into the gym, showed off all his post moves and finished the session with a series of is-he-really-that-athletic? dunks.

It didn't take long for the chatter to return, the oohs and aahs reverberating through the gym, directed toward the consensus national player of the year and University of North Carolina superstar Tyler Hansbrough.

Hansbrough, along with Tar Heels point guard Bobby Frasor, came to Conestoga on Wednesday as a special guest of former teammate Dewey Burke, who helps run two basketball camps at his old school.

"It's all about the kids," said Burke, who walked on to the UNC team after starring as both a football and basketball player at Conestoga. "Being from here, having played here, to be able to give back and bring in this kind of caliber guy is special. And it's something these kids will remember for the rest of their lives. They can always say, 'I was face to face with the national player of the year.'"

Burke said it was a gift to play alongside Hansbrough and Frasor and become best friends with the two of them.

But the real gift was that the Conestoga alum flew both players into Philly, coaxing them away by convincing UNC's strength and conditioning coach that he'd make sure they'd get in some work.

On Tuesday night, he took the two to Citizen's Bank Park, where they watched the Phillies game from the owner's box. And naturally, they all went to one of the state's most well-known attractions -- Wawa. "You gotta do that," Burke said.

In front of the campers -- from both the Dewey Burke Camp and the Sky High camp, run by Conestoga girls basketball

coach John Jones -- Hansbrough displayed his best moves, answered questions and passed along age-old truths like "You have to work on your free throws" and "No one really likes Duke."

"I was glad to come up here and do something for Dewey, doing good things for the kids," said Hansbrough, a 6-foot-9 power forward who averaged 22.6 points per game as a junior last season. "As a young guy, I always looked up to guys in college. To come here and get to know them and teach them a couple of pointers is great."

The campers soaked it all in -- and for good reason. On the list of role models in the world of sports today, it would be hard to rank many athletes higher than Hansbrough.

Not only is the North Carolina star poised to become a four-time All-American, he also probably surprised the most cynical sports fan when he passed up the millions of dollars the NBA would offer to return to school -- the first time since Virginia's Ralph Sampson in 1982 that a reigning Naismith Award winner didn't turn pro.

The reasons for that decision, which he reiterated on Wednesday, are simple.

He's loyal: "I wanted to leave with the same people I came in with."

He's hungry: "I feel like the NBA is gonna be there. Hopefully we can win a championship."

He's grounded: "When I get my degree, I'll really accomplish something."

And perhaps most of all, he loves the college experience -- from going to the Final Four to playing pickup ball to Barack Obama to dunking on 7-foot-7 Kenny George and to playing intense games of ping-pong with Frasor.

"We just like to have fun," he said.

Behind the fun, however, is an intensity that can sometimes be frightening -- which is why he's known to many as "Psycho T."

"He's truly the most intense person I've ever seen," Burke said. "It's 24 hours a day with him. He eats the right stuff. He sleeps on sheets that puts nutrients in his body. He trains six hours a day. He's always hydrating."

"You can see him -- he's a specimen. Yes, he has god's gifts but he works so hard. I've never seen anyone work harder than him."

With Hansbrough returning to Chapel Hill, along with Wayne Ellington, Danny Green and Ty Lawson, the Tar Heels figure to be ranked No. 1 consensually in the preseason. The team should also get a boost with the return of Frasor, who missed most of last season with a torn ACL.

"The knee's good," Frasor said. "I just got cleared to play a week or two ago. It's nice to be back in action."

The 6-foot-3 guard out of Chicago was a key component for Heels before getting hurt, but he admits he can easily be overlooked when he goes places with Hansbrough.

"Especially in North Carolina, people recognize him and say, 'Oh, you play too, right?'" Frasor said. "You're always the second person to be recognized. But he deserves the attention. He's worked for it. I can blend in with the average person. It's a little harder for him when he's 6-9."

Burke knows a thing or two about blending in.

With a slight frame and a baby face, Burke isn't nearly the same kind of "specimen" as his buddy Hansbrough.

But his athletic career has been marked not by blending in but by standing out, often times unexpectedly.

At Conestoga, he was a first-team All-Area wide receiver before earning a scholarship to play football at Fairfield University.

Burke, however, was then sucker-punched twice in succession -- first when he tore his ACL on the third day of preseason practice, next when the school cut the football program altogether.

At that point, the 2002 Conestoga grad decided to apply to North Carolina and try to walk on the team because "of all the history and prestige.

"I got the feeling that if I really put the time in and I promised myself that no one would outwork me, then I'd have a chance," Burke said. "And that's all I wanted was a chance. Coach (Roy) Williams was good enough to give me a shot and let me try it and I was fortunate enough to make it. The rest has just been gravy."

It's funny Burke should say that because in Chapel Hill he is now known simply as "Biscuits" --- a moniker given to him after he twice hit a 3-pointer to push the Tar Heels over 100 points and enable everyone in the crowd to buy sausage biscuits from Bojangles' for a special promotion deal of \$1.

"Every time I stop by a Bojangles', I always take a picture and send it to him," Hansbrough said, laughing.

Draining 3-point shots in blowouts may not be on the same level as, say, scoring over 2,000 points in your career like Hansbrough -- but it's still an impressive feat for someone who for a long time never even thought about playing college basketball.

"Going down south was a big adjustment," said Burke, who after graduating from UNC last May started his own after-school program for underprivileged kids in North Carolina. "I didn't know anyone. But I was able to carve my own path.

"It was so much bigger and better than I could have ever imagined."

Burke's success story on one of basketball's biggest stages was not surprising to Jones, a good friend who once called Burke the school's very own Rudy.

"I remember him talking to the kids at a camp, and telling them he shoots 2,000 shots a day," Jones said. "Who does that?"

The same kind of guy who brings the face of college basketball to his hometown.

For more information on the Sky High and Dewey Burke basketball camps, visit dbcamps.com.

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