

Island Sports

Former European basketball star preps N.K. freshmen for play-offs

By Adrienne Downing

Second of two parts

After four years of playing college basketball at the University of Rhode Island, Michael Andersen had a choice to make – he could stay in the U.S. and hope to make it with one of the teams that had invited him to try out, or he could return to his native Europe.

“I tried out for the NBA a few times. But the problem was, I always had a guaranteed contract waiting for me in Europe. So if it wasn’t a guaranteed contract, I wouldn’t stick around,” he said.

Trying out for the NBA teams was not a complete loss for Andersen, however.

One of the things he learned has even benefited some Jamestown and North Kingstown basketball players. While trying out for the New Jersey Nets, Andersen learned a conditioning drill that he uses with the kids he coaches on the North Kingstown High School boys’ freshman basketball team – and he taught it to Jamestown coach Eric Bush to use with his players.

“Byron Scott had me run this drill when I tried out there where

you hold your arms up over your head. When you run, you use your arms. When you run with your arms up, it is a lot more difficult,” he said.

After trying out for the NBA teams, Andersen decided to head to Europe. But returning to his homeland of Denmark was not an option at the time, he said.

“In the last four or five years, Denmark has gotten a professional team, but there is basically no money in it, it’s like semi-pro,” Andersen said.

So Andersen and Ellen started their eight-city tour of Europe in Greece.

“She liked some places and she hated other places,” he said. “My favorite place to play was Naples because I played a lot there and I played really well.” He played three years in Naples, and his oldest child was born during that time.

One of his two favorite memories in his basketball career came while he was in Greece, Andersen said.

“My senior year, we went to the NCAAs. When I came to Greece, we played in the European National Championship. I played in front of 15,000 crazy Greek and Italian fans. That was great,” he said.

Because his playing style was mainly American, thanks to his URI college career, playing in the European leagues required a few adjustments for Andersen.

“The one thing I really had to learn was to take the charge, to flop,” he said. “Everyone always says that American basketball is more about dribbling and driving to the basket. European basketball is more dribbling to the basket and then passing out – more because it is not so open in Europe, the lane is more packed because there is no illegal defense in Europe like there



Michael Andersen takes a break with the Jamestown players on N.K. High School's freshman basketball team.

Photo by Caitlin Downing

is in the NBA.”

Playing in Europe requires more of a team effort, Andersen said.

“The NBA, with the open style, is more of an individual sport than it is a team sport. You can have a great season with one great player, whereas in Europe, you don’t have someone scoring 45 points in a game. You can’t do that in European basketball. But in the NBA, you can because it is a lot more open, a lot more space.”

Although Ellen did relocate with him to Europe, when it came time for the births of their two children, she headed back to Jamestown.

“Our oldest was born while I was playing in Naples and the youngest while in Poland,” he said.

The globetrotting Andersen kids have a sense of adventure, he said.

“They remember being in Greece. They keep saying ‘When are we going back to Greece?’ They

like the change. When we were in Greece, they wanted to go back to Jamestown,” Andersen said.

Now that he has retired from playing, there are only a few things Andersen misses.

“Just playing in front of a lot of people, if you have never done it, try to go on a court when there are 14,000 people screaming and cheering for you – it is something I miss. You get used to it, but once you don’t get it anymore, you miss it,” he said.

But even the cheering fans were not enough to keep Andersen playing any longer.

“I’m 35. The money I used to make just wasn’t there anymore. The timing was good with Rider starting kindergarten. I don’t miss it really,” he said. “The team I played for last year was in so much financial trouble that I think I got out of there just in time. Most of the players that I played with last year did not get all their money.”

Andersen said he is looking forward to spending the summer in Jamestown, and tries to keep himself busy.

“I play basketball two or three times a week – Wednesday nights at Lawn and Sunday mornings in Newport. I figured it would be a good way for me to meet the guys from the island,” he said. “For me, it is just fun. I am not trying to dominate or anything, I just run up and down. My knees hurt a lot more than they used to, even just playing twice a week.”

Andersen said that eventually, he would like to coach professionally, most likely at the college level, but for now, he is enjoying the time with his wife and children – and getting the freshman team ready for the play-offs.

“Now it’s serious,” he said. “If we lose, we’re done.”

N.K.H.S. hosts parent info event tonight

North Kingstown High School will hold an information night for parents and incoming eighth-grade students tonight, Feb. 4, at 6:30 p.m. in the high school auditorium.

Parents and students of the class of 2014 are invited to attend and learn more about the high school and its programs.

Call 268-6240 for more information.

Register now for Cal Ripken baseball

Registration is now open for the 2010 season of Jamestown Cal Ripken baseball.

Four leagues will be formed this year: Cal Ripken Majors (9 to 12 years old), Cal Ripken Minors (8 to 10 years old), Rookies (6 to 7 years old) and Tee Ball (4 to 5 years old). The age structure of the leagues may change, depending on the number of players that register in each age group.

All players who did not play in the majors in 2009 must try out.

Registration is \$50 for players registered before March 15; after March 15, the registration fee is \$75.

Forms are available at www.jamestownri.com/baseball. Registration, including payment, can be completed online or by mail.

Contact Steve Cirella, league president, at 423-1425 or at scirella926@gmail.com for more information.

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