

HOOPSCOOPONLINE COVERAGE

By Clark Francis www.hoopscooponline.com

Tuesday, June 17, 2008

The Freshman All-American Camp and the Junior All-American Camp at the Hoop Magic Sports Academy in Chantilly, VA, there was still a steady stream of late signings by players in the Class of 2008 and verbal commitments from players in the Class of 2009 that we need to address. And right at the top of the list is 6'9 Jr Brendan Lane from Rocklin (H.S.) CA, who is ranked #59 nationally in the junior class and is one of the top power forwards on the West Coast. Our West Coast Editor Dinos Trigonis was the first person to tip us off on Saturday about Lane picking the Bruins, but the guy who really thinks Lane is a steal for the Bruins is our other West Coast Editor Alan Utter. Lane has a great mid-range game, is aggressiveness around the basket, and is very good defensively and at blocking shots," says Utter. "He does need to get bigger and stronger physically, but he's bouncy and athletic, which should make Lane a good complement to Reaves Nelson in year's recruiting class." Remember, Nelson is a 6'7 force to be reckoned with from Modesto (Christian) CA, but he's really an undersized power forward, who reminds one more of Kevin Love than the Wear twins.

Speaking of the 6'9 Jr Travis Wear from Santa Ana (Mater Dei) CA and 6'9 Jr David Wear from Santa Ana (Mater Dei) CA, both of whom are already for North Carolina, they're both ranked ahead of Lane in our most recent rankings. But Utter is willing to go on record and stack his credibility and reputation on the fact that Lane will be the best of the three players, which explains why this addition moves UCLA's recruiting class into a tie at #4, along with Florida, on our list of the Top Recruiting Classes To-Date for the Class of 2009. Utter also tells us that USC is finally done recruiting with the recent additions of 6'6 Leonard Washington from Compton, CA and 6'10 Nikola Vucevic from Simi Valley (Stoneridge Prep) CA. Washington has committed to and re-neged on the Trojans so many times we're tired of talking about it. But the addition of Vucevic is interesting, because we're talking about a 6'10, 240-pound skilled inside player who can score inside, pass the ball back out to the open man, and run the court surprisingly well for somebody his size. Vucevic also is only 17-years-old and, up until now, has flown under the radar screen due to the fact that he didn't play any AAU ball and his prep school team played a limited schedule this past season. In other words, we may be talking about a major sleeper and several people who have seen him play think Vucevic should be ranked among our 100 seniors nationally.

So it should come as no surprise that Southern Cal's recruiting class, which also already includes 6'5 Demar Derozan from Compton (H.S.) CA, 5'11 Donte Smith from Mt. San Antonio (JC) CA, and 6'0 Percy Miller from Beverly Hills (H.S.) CA, moves back up into a tie at #7, along with Connecticut and Memphis, on our list of the Top Recruiting Classes To-Date for the Class of 2008. And this is important, because it looks like none of the fallout surrounding the O.J. Mayo controversy has effected the Trojans coaching staff's ability to both recruit and keep the current players they already have in the fold. Moral to the story, some programs make excuses why they can't get it done and others, like USC, just keep right on getting it done. Remember, a year ago this also was the program that finished with the #1-ranked recruiting class in our Final Ranking of the Top Recruiting Classes for the Class of 2007 when they landed 6'5 O.J. Mayo from Huntington (H.S.) WV, 6'8 Davon Jefferson from Venice, CA, 5'10 Angelo Johnson from Simi

Valley (Stoneridge Prep) CA, 6'11 Mamadou Diarra from Simi Valley (Stoneridge Prep) CA, 6'6 Leonard Washington from Lake Charles (Washington Marion) LA, and 6'5 Marcus Simmons from Alexandria (Peabody) LA. Utter also tells us that 6'6 Frosh Derrick Jasper is transferring from the University of Kentucky to UNLV and 6'9 Charles Garcia from Riverside (JC) CA has verbally committed to the University of Washington. And the commitment by Garcia is big, because he is a big strong highly touted power forward who was one of the top freshmen in the junior college ranks this past season. He also should be the perfect replacement for 6'7 Jr Jon Brockman, who is one of the best power forwards in the Pacific-10 Conference and who must be replaced when he graduates after next season.

Another freshman in the junior college ranks who made an early verbal commitment yesterday was 6'3 Dwight Buycks from Indian Hills (JC) IA. Buycks decided to return home (he's originally from Milwaukee, WI) and attend Marquette, which means the Golden Eagles now already have three players in the fold in next year's recruiting class that also already includes 6'7 Erik Williams from Cypress (Cypress Springs) TX and 6'6 Jeronne Maymon from Madison (Memorial) WI and is now ranked #8 on our list of the Top Recruiting Classes To-Date for the Class of 2009. And our Wisconsin/Minnesota/Iowa/Illinois/Indiana Editor Antonio Curro thinks this is an excellent catch, because Buycks is versatile and athletic enough to play either guard spot in the Big East and is capable of doing a lot of different things well, as is evident by the fact that he averaged 15.7 ppg, 4.2 rpg, and 2.6 apg this past season in one of the toughest junior college leagues in the nation. This also comes right on the heels of Marquette's current recruiting class, which includes 6'6 Jimmy Butler from Tyler (JC) TX, 6'7 Joseph Fulce from Tyler (JC) TX, and 6'10 Chris Otule from Ft. Bend (Bush) TX. However, new Golden Eagles head coach Buzz Williams' best recruit is arguably former Nebraska assistant coach Tony Benford, who is one of the most astute evaluators of talent and best recruiters in the business. Our Mid-South Editor Jim Rothman tells us that 6'5 Roburt Sallie from San Francisco City (JC) CA has picked the University of Memphis over schools like Cincinnati and Kentucky. And this too is significant, because suddenly the Tigers have not one, not two, but three athletic wing players in the fold as they attempt to replace 6'3 Frosh Derrick Rose and 6'6 Jr Chris Douglas-Roberts, both of whom entered their names into the NBA Draft earlier this spring.

We also have confirmed that the University of Tennessee has landed 6'7 Emmanuel Negedu from Wolfeboro (Brewster Academy) NH, who is ranked #50 nationally in the senior class by the HOOP SCOOP and appears to be the final piece to the puzzle in a recruiting class that is now ranked #6 on our list of the Top Recruiting Classes To-Date for the Class of 2008 and also already includes 6'7 Scotty Hopson from Hopkinsville (University Heights) KY, 6'2 Bobby Maze from Hutchinson (JC) TX, 6'8 Renaldo Woolridge from North Hollywood (Harvard-Westlake) CA, 6'11 Phillip Jurrick from Chattanooga (East Ridge) TN, and 6'1 Daniel West from Saginaw (H.S.) MI. Remember, Negedu has a reputation for being a high energy undersized power forward who gets the most of what he has, which makes him ideally suited to step in and play for Volunteers head coach Bruce Pearl. We also think it is impressive just who many different places the Tennessee coaching staff went to put together this year's recruiting class, as they landed one player out of their own backyard (Jurrick), beat the University of Kentucky in their backyard for Hopson, got Maze out of the junior college ranks, went East into the prep school ranks to get Negedu out of the prep school ranks, went into the Midwest to get West out of Michigan, and went West to get Woolridge. However, none of this should come as much of a

surprise when one remembers that Pearl has two of the best, as well as two of the hardest working assistant coaches in the business, in Tony Jones and Steve Forbes.

It also looks like 6'6" Jr Brian Oliver from Mouth of Wilson (Oak Hill) VA has verbally committed to Georgia Tech, 6'1" Chris Bass from Lee (Academy) ME will attend LSU, 6'8" Augustus Gilchrist from Hyattsville (Progressive Christian) MD is now heading to South Florida, 6'8" Joey Cameron from Chipola (JC) FL has become New Orleans' sixth recruit in a recruiting class that is currently ranked #35 on our list of the Top Recruiting Classes To-Date for the Class of 2008 and also already includes 5'11" Darrion McKinstry from Fullerton (JC) CA, 6'10" Jacoby Pittman from Madison (Central) MS, 6'4" Paul Hagler from Mendenhall (Genesis One) MS, 6'8" Ejike Hart from Hillsborough (JC) FL, and 6'0" Destin Damachousa from Polk (JC) KS. Gilchrist, who originally signed with Virginia Tech as a high school senior at Ft. Washington (Friendly) MD a year ago and then enrolled at the University of Maryland after signing with the Terrapins last fall, was declared ineligible to play for Maryland several weeks ago. So now Gilchrist becomes the marquee player in a recruiting class that now appears to be a major step in the right direction, as Bulls head coach Stan Heath and his staff have already have 5'11" Dwan McMillan from Newark (St. Benedict's) NJ, 6'7" Eladio Espinosa from Chatham (Hargrave Military) VA, 6'7" Eugene Teague from Pennsauken (Apex Academies) NJ, 6'3" Gaby Belardo from Fitchburg (Notre Dame) MA, and 6'9" Alex Rivas-Sanchez from Pratt (JC) KS in the fold in a recruiting class that is now ranked #39 on our list of the Top Recruiting Classes To-Date for the Class of 2008. Bass is the younger brother of former LSU star Brandon Bass. But, unlike his older brother, Bass is a combo guard player, instead of a stud around the basket. He also promises to be a good role player, instead of one of the stars of the team. Oliver is ranked #45 nationally in the junior class by the HOOP SCOOP and is one of the better 3-point shooters in the junior class nationally.

Monday, June 16, 2008

Watching all the good rising freshmen and rising 8th Graders at the Freshman All-American Camp and the Junior All-American Camp at the Hoop Magic Sports Academy in Chantilly, VA was a great head start on the future. But the real highlight of the camp was getting to see all of the incredible talent that Clay Dade, who is the director of both camps, had assembled in the youngest two age groups. And right at the top of the list was 5'5" 6th Grader Allonzo Trier from Federal Way, WA, who not only was the best player in the Rising 7th Grade Division, but also played up and averaged over 20.0 ppg in two games in the Rising 8th Grade Division and scored seven points while playing in a quarter of a game in the Rising Freshman Division. Thus, explains why we have Trier ranked #12 overall in camp in the Rising 8th Grade Division and why we think he would have been one of the better guards in the Rising Freshman Division, if he'd gotten the opportunity.

Trier is clearly the best player in the nation in his class due to the fact that he has the heart and desire, speed and quickness, ball handling and passing skills, and court savvy and basketball IQ necessary to be a great player. However, what really sets Trier apart from the rest of his peers is his ability to score. Not only does Trier have a knack for finding a way to get his shot off against bigger and stronger guys inside, but he also is deadly from beyond the arc, and he has an incredible mid-range game. Another one of the big reasons why Trier, who reminds us so much of 6'2" Brandon Jennings from Mouth of Wilson (Oak Hill) VA, is so far ahead of everybody else in his class is the fact that he's

gotten great teaching and skill development at the Five-Star Basketball Camp, where he was named the Most Outstanding Player of the camp each of the last two years. And making the story even more interesting is the fact that Trier's mother tells us that one of his goals is to go back to Five-Star every summer for the next six years and become the only player in the history of the camp to be named the Most Outstanding Player in his age group eight straight years. The other player in camp who played up a year in class and was clearly one of the better players in camp was 5'4 5th Grader Perry Dozier from Columbia, SC, who is the son and nephew of former Baltimore (Dunbar) MD and University of South Carolina twin towers Perry and Terry Dozier. However, Dozier's multi-dimensional game reminds us more of 6'5 Jr Lance Stephenson from Brooklyn (Lincoln) NY, who is the best 6th Grader we've ever seen and, at the time, when we first saw him six years ago was even then capable of playing any position on the court. Dozier not only was the second best player on his team in the Rising 7th Grade Division, but he totally dominated the Rising 6th Grade All-Star Game, which lasted only half as long as the other four all-star games, with 11 points, 11 rebounds, four assists, four steals, 5'7 field goals, and 1-1 3-pointers. As a matter of fact, Dozier was so good that there is no question in our mind that he gets the nod as the best 5th Grader in the nation, ahead of 5'10 5th Grader Tyler Dorsey from Pasadena, CA and 5'6 5th Grader Malik Ellison from New Jersey.

We also were totally impressed with 5'2 6th Grader Parker Cartwright from Van Nuys, CA. Not only was he phenomenal all weekend with his explosiveness, athleticism, and incredible moves to get to the basket, but Cartwright took it right to Trier, who was guarding him in the all-star game, as he was the leading scorer with 13 points and turned in the best performance in the Rising 7th Grade All-Star Game. We also were really impressed with the size, athleticism, and ability to block shots and run the court that we saw from 6'4 6th Grader Craig Victor from New Orleans, LA, who finished with four points, six rebounds, three blocked shots, and 2-4 field goals in the Rising 7th Grade All-Star Game. However, we have to give 5'6 6th Grader James Blackmon from Ft. Wayne, IN the nod as the #3-ranked player in this age group due to the fact that consistency counts and he also was one of the three best players in the Rising 7th Grade All-Star Game, along with Cartwright and Trier. We also have to give 5'3 6th Grader James Cunningham from Lexington, KY the nod over 5'2 6th Grader Justin Jenifer from Baltimore, MD as the #2-ranked point guard in camp due to the fact that Jenifer was missing in action the last day-and-a-half of camp due to the fact that he had another tournament to play in. And it might have been a good thing for Jenifer, who prior to going head-to-head against Trier in the 6th Grade All-Star Game last summer the adidas Junior Phenom Camp in San Diego, CA, was the consensus #1-ranked player nationally in his class. Trier also got the better of Jenifer in the rematch in the scrimmage that took place on the first night of camp, but Jenifer still has to be regarded as one of the premier players in the nation in his class, because he's a strong physical point guard who can flat out score both inside and outside.

We also have high praise for 4'11 6th Grader Jerron Love from Bronx, NY, because he was one of the best defensive players in camp, and this age group also had more than its share of multi-dimensional athletes, like 5'9 6th Grader Anton Beard from North Little Rock, AR and 6'0 6th Grader Dylan Portwood from Georgetown, KY and 6'0 6th Grader Conner McCullough from Stillwell, KS, who were capable of playing both inside and outside. And Beard, Portwood, and McCullough, who are three of our top four power forwards in camp, provide a classic illustration of how we rank players in camp. When

it doubt go with where a player plays at the defensive end and also remember that in this day-and-age everybody thinks they're a perimeter player. In other words, if you're the tallest player on your team, you can't defend anybody out on the perimeter, and/or you playing inside at the defensive end in camp, you're probably going to be listed as a power forward or a center. And a perfect illustration of this is 6'5 8th Grader Justin Anderson from Spotsylvania, VA, who brought the ball up the court and knocked down the more than his share of 3-pointers at the offensive end, but was clearly one of the most dominant inside players in camp at the defensive end. Speaking of Anderson, he edges out 6'6 8th Grader Winston Sheppard from Houston, TX, who also falls into the same category of being a power forward in camp, but will be listed as a wing forward when we rank him among the top 10 players nationally in his class the next time we update our ranking of the top players in this class, for the top spot in the Rising Freshman Division.

However, our favorite player in this age group has to be 6'6 8th Grader Ricardo Gathers from New Orleans, LA, who reminds us Dwight Howard in many ways. We're talking about somebody who can step outside and hit an occasional three, which he did in the all-star game. But Gathers also knows what his bread and butter are, as is evident by the fact that he had 14 points and nine rebound in the Rising Freshman All-Star Game. We also were really impressed with two other players from New Orleans, LA, as 6'3 8th Grader Sydnie London finished with nine points and hit the game winning shot in the Rising Freshman All-Star Game and 5'10 8th Grader Javan Felix made some great passes and did a great job of changing speeds when he wanted to get past a defender and/or go to the basket. And, of course, we liked 6'2 8th Grader D'Vaunte Smith-Rivera from Indianapolis, IN. But we'd like Smith-Rivera even more if he'd use his size, strength, and athleticism to dominate inside, instead of trying to be a point guard. But we still rank Smith-Rivera in our top five in the Rising Freshman Division, because 6'8 8th Grader Perry Ellis from Wichita, KS didn't stick around to play in the Rising Freshman All-Star Game, which is a no-no when you're looking for the benefit of the doubt when it comes to being ranked high in camp. And the best example of this is 6'4 8th Grader Michael Avery from Lake Sherwood, CA, who got out of Dodge as fast as possible after being named to play in the Second 20 Rising Freshman All-Star Game. Instead, Avery should have attempted to suck it up and proven that everybody, including us, missed on him by snubbing him from being in the Top 20 Game. However, then again Avery had a tough week, as he was matched up against 6'5 8th Grader Justin Anderson from Spotsylvania, VA in a game that was televised by a local station featuring the guy who made a verbal commitment to the University of Kentucky in 8th Grade versus the best player in camp. Needless to say it was ugly, but Avery's lack of speed and quickness were probably saved from getting exposed even further by his not being selected to play in the Top 20 Rising Freshman Game.

Also noteworthy is the fact that 6'5 7th Grader Brian Bridgewater from Baton Rouge, LA, who finished ranked #4 in the Rising 8th Grader Division, behind 5'11 7th Grader Bryson Scott from Ft. Wayne, IN, 6'3 7th Grader Tarique Thompson from Columbia, SC, and 6'3 7th Grader Jubril Adedkaya from Tinley Park, IL, may have cost himself the #1-ranked in his age group due to the fact that he had to catch a plane. Moral to the story, it's not a good idea to leave camp early if you're interested in being ranked as high as possible. And even worse are the guys who indicate that they have an interest in attending the camp, but don't bother to show up at all. Some of the elite names on this list include 6'8 8th Grader Tony Parker from Lithonia, GA, 6'4 8th Grader Reggie Ragland from Huntsville, AL, 6'1 7th Grader Kasey Hill from Eustis, FL, 5'4 7th Grader Ethan Telfair

from Brooklyn, NY, and 5'6 5th Grader Malik Ellison from New Jersey.