

William Penn coach wishes Roundtree had stayed

Written by Jim Ecker

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Tasha Roundtree had gotten off to a good start at William Penn University this year and appeared to be in good spirits as she made the transition to college, but she abruptly quit school a few weeks ago and returned to Cedar Rapids.

"To be quite honest with you, she was here one minute and gone the next," said Mike Brown, the women's basketball coach at William Penn. "She just kind of disappeared."

Roundtree, 19, was shot and killed in Cedar Rapids this past weekend. The Cedar Rapids police department is calling her death a homicide. No arrests have been made.

Brown knew Roundtree would require extra attention in college due to her sub-par academic performance at Cedar Rapids Washington, but he found Roundtree to be a bright, fun-loving person who had a chance to succeed as a student and basketball player.

Roundtree was going to redshirt this season for two reasons. She was still recovering from knee surgery after tearing her ACL last February, but she also would have been academically ineligible with the Statesmen for failing to meet NAIA standards.

All freshmen at NAIA schools like William Penn must meet at least two-of-three requirements to play in their first year on campus:

- 1) A 2.0 high school GPA or better.
- 2) A satisfactory score on the ACT college entrance exam.
- 3) Graduate in the top half of their class.

Roundtree never took an ACT exam, according to Brown, and she failed to meet the other two requirements as well. "She had three strikes right there," he said. "She knew that, and we talked about that."

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Nonetheless, Brown and Washington girls basketball coach Frank Howell thought Roundtree had a chance to succeed once she got in a college environment and away from what Cedar Rapids Washington people have described as "obstacles" in her home life.

Roundtree's mother was killed in a car accident six years ago and apparently she had other significant factors to overcome.

"That's why Coach Howell and I thought this would be a good place for her, because she could redshirt, she could get right in the classroom, we could monitor her a little bit closer than some programs do and try to get her turned around with life-skill lessons," said Brown.

Brown said he doesn't think Roundtree had any significant problems at William Penn.

"No. Not really," he said. "Actually she was really good. She was doing fine here.

"Knowing her background a little bit, I thought we'd have a little bit of a problem with her going to class. But she went to class, was always on time. Even though she was redshirting, I think she toed the line, because basketball meant a lot to her. She just loved to play the game."

Brown said he met with Roundtree a short time before she left school. She gave no indication that anything was wrong or that she planned to leave Oskaloosa.

"We were sitting there laughing and joking about playing and different things," he related. "She's friendly. She'd talk to anybody. She had a magnetic personality. She could talk with bad people, she could talk with good people.

"I guess you could call her a free spirit. She was a great kid."

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Roundtree had a partial basketball scholarship at William Penn and was receiving additional financial aid, according to Brown. That helped offset a major portion of the \$20,000 annual cost.

He said Roundtree's financial package made it possible for her to attend school. "I think it was do-able. Very do-able," he said.

Classes at William Penn began on Aug. 21. Brown said Roundtree left Oskaloosa about three weeks later. And shortly after that, she was shot and killed in southwest Cedar Rapids.

"It's a sad ending to a tough life, I can tell you that," said Brown. "Sometimes I wish I could have kept her here. Frank (Howell) and I have talked about that.

"If we could have kept her here, maybe something like this wouldn't have happened. It's such a sad deal for a fun-loving kid. It's a tragedy."