

Coleman brothers are buddies and top cagers

Written by Jim Ecker
Sunday, 17 February 2013 22:25 -

There was a time when Alex Coleman didn't like having his younger brother Josiah around.

"He was a little knucklehead, always running beneath mom," Alex said Sunday, laughing at the memory. "You know, he never did anything wrong."

Somewhere along the line, his kid brother went from being a pest to being a best friend. They both played basketball at Cedar Rapids Kennedy and they're both playing for successful college teams this season.

Alex Coleman is averaging 12 points and a team-high 7.5 rebounds as a senior for Mount Mercy University, which has a 25-4 record and is ranked 10th in the nation in the latest NAIA Division II poll.

Josiah Coleman is averaging 7.7 points and 5.0 rebounds as a freshman at Iowa Western Community College, which has a glittering 26-2 mark and is ranked No.9 in the NJCAA Division I poll.

Both brothers are 6-foot-5 forwards, but they are not carbon copies of each other.

"We're different ballplayers, actually," Alex said. "He was more offensive-minded and I'm more defensive-minded. I would say there are more differences than similarities."

Josiah learned to look up to Alex for advice and guidance, both in sports and life. "I'd say he's basically my best friend and a buddy to me," Josiah said.

Alex said he had to grow into the role of being a good big brother.

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"He kind of clung to me at first, then I took him under my wings," Alex said. "He noticed the things I was doing and wanted to be around me more.

"I guess I could say he inspired me. I wanted to be somebody he could look up to and follow and do the right things."

Alex, 22, is three years older than Josiah, who is 19. They are three years apart in school and never played on the same teams at Kennedy. In fact, they rarely played one-on-one basketball against each other while growing up.

That changed last summer, and both brothers laugh about the experience. They played a series of seven games. Whoever got to 11 points first was the winner.

"I'd never really played him before, because he was so much stronger. But I knew it would help me," said Josiah. "I beat him the first few games and he realized that shouldn't be happening."

The games got increasingly physical as the day wore on.

"There was a little blood," reported Alex, laughing. "There are always hard fouls. I actually think there was some glass broken, but I won't go into details on that.

"The tension was there. It was competitive."

They crowned a winner, but prefer to keep it quiet, just among brothers and buddies. "It was pretty even," said Alex, letting it go at that.

Alex advised Josiah to play for a junior college before attending a four-year school. That's the path Alex followed, playing at Kirkwood Community College before moving to Mount Mercy,

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and he thought Josiah would benefit from a similar experience.

"I told him he needs to play JUCO ball to figure things out," said Alex.

Josiah followed his brother's advice and plans to play at Iowa Western again next season as a sophomore.

Josiah appreciates the guidance he's received from Alex. He enjoyed watching Alex play at Kirkwood and Mount Mercy while he was still in high school, saying it taught him what it would take to make the next step in his career.

"It prepared me for college and what I needed to do to get ready," Josiah said. "On and off the court, he taught me to be stronger and be more independent."

Alex is a criminal justice major with a minor in sociology. He plans to finish his classes this spring and work as an intern this summer to finish his degree.

Both brothers are trying to help their teams reach their national tournaments and finish the season in style. Alex described his role at Mount Mercy as the "glue" guy for Coach Paul Gavin and the Mustangs.

"I keep everything together," he said. "I'm not focused on scoring or how many rebounds I get and all that. It's just 'get the job done.'"

"He (Gavin) expects me to keep everybody together. If things get out of control, I'm the guy that he would expect to pull things together for him before he has to call a timeout."

Mount Mercy will host the AIB School of Business in the first round of the Midwest Collegiate

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Conference playoffs Wednesday night, the first step on the road to nationals. Iowa Western has a few games left in the regular season before its postseason tournament begins.

It's a busy time of year for both brothers, but they enjoy comparing notes.

"We talk every other day, all the time," said Alex. "He's not only my little brother, he's one of my best friends."