

Fisher standout sets aim for future play in Europe

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — If you want to find Wakili Moore these days, chances are you'll either find him in a weight room, or in a gym shooting countless jump shots.

The St. John Fisher College senior has a goal: to play in the European basketball leagues.

If Moore's track record is any indication, he might just be playing the game that he loves on foreign soil come this time next year.

That aspiration is just another in a basketball career that saw Moore lead Aquinas Institute to the Section 5 Class AAA finals in 1986, and earn spots in the Fisher record books.

Among the records he has achieved at Fisher are: career three-pointers (131); most three-pointers in a season (74, in 1989/90); fourth in career foul shooting percentage (82 percent); fourth in career scoring (1,151 points); and fourth in games played (101).

Moore's basketball roots go back to his father, Eldridge Moore, who excelled in basketball at Suffolk University in Boston, Mass. After averaging between 18 and 20 points during his four-year college career, the elder Moore earned a spot on the Greater-Boston All-Star Team that played in the Naismith Hall of Fame Game in 1959. That opportunity earned him a place on a plaque in the College Basketball Hall of Fame in Springfield, Mass.

The Moore family moved to Rochester, where Wakili and his older brother Eldee — along with their father and mother — regularly played basketball in their yard, or on weekends, in the University of Rochester gym.

Wakili followed his brother to McQuaid in 1982. When he realized that there wasn't an opening for him on the team, Wakili transferred to Aquinas, where he played under former AQ and Bishop Kearney basketball coach Mike Ruff.

Ruff recalls Moore as stocky and short, but with a good shooting touch. "He was an excellent outside shooter," Ruff said. "He could shoot it from anywhere."

Meanwhile, Moore had to play against his brother, putting his parents in an awkward situation. "We'd sit on one side one half, on the other side the other half," his father recalled, adding with a laugh, "We didn't cheer too loud."

By his senior year, Moore had emerged as a starter, and helped lead the Little Irish to a 16-6 record and the sectional finals. His success may have come too late however, since no Division I schools expressed any interest in him.

"I was a little heavier," Moore acknowledged. "Division I and II schools shied away."

But St. John Fisher coach Bobby Wanzer, who is a member of the Professional Basketball Hall of Fame, did show interest, and Moore enrolled at the Rochester college. "I liked playing for a hall-of-famer," Moore said. "He gave me some offensive tips."

Moore did not find many opportunities to use those tips as a freshman, spending much of the season on the bench. He realized that he needed to lose weight and develop his speed in order to have a chance to play up to his potential.

During the off-season, Moore began to lift weights, run and practice in earnest, turning body fat into muscle, and extending his shooting range.

Moore found himself starting at shooting guard his sophomore year. He averaged 10 points-per-game for a 14-12 team, and was looking forward to more experience at guard his junior year. But when Moore returned to school in the fall, he learned that the team's point guard had transferred out and that he would now have to take over the task of running the offense.

Despite his inexperience at the point, Moore averaged nearly 13 points per game that season, and led the team to a 19-9 record.

Bob Ward, who replaced Wanzer as the Fisher coach prior to Moore's sophomore year, watched the former AQ star work continuously to polish his game.

"His defense improved," Ward said. "He made a great effort to improve his ball handling. He was consistent and stable. He was just fun to be around."

To take advantage of his shooting ability, Ward moved Moore back to the shooting guard position his senior season. Moore finished the season as the team's leading scorer, averaging better than 25-points-a-game over the second half. He was one of the main reasons Fisher recovered from a 6-8 start to finish 14-11.

Marring what might otherwise have been a good final season was an incident at the University of Rochester Feb. 24 during a game between the Cardinals and the Yellow Jackets.

During the game, a U. of R. student held up a derogatory sign offending Moore's mother. She asked the student to take down the sign, but — according to newspaper reports — other U. of R. students then became abusive.

Moore left the game floor to help his parents. "The only thing I was worried about was (my mother) getting hurt," Moore said.



St. John Fisher College
Wakili Moore (44) is hoping that the shooting touch that carried him to successful basketball careers at Aquinas and St. John Fisher College will land him a spot on a European professional team this fall.

Another Fisher player allegedly hit the U. of R. student who held up the sign, and now faces charges. Meanwhile, in an open letter in the university's newsletter *Currents*, President Dennis O'Brien officially apologized for the incident, saying that it carried "the ugly smell of racism."

O'Brien said that he was ashamed that U. of R. students could show "such witless unconcern for the feelings of others."

The university is also currently investigating the incident, and the students involved could be subjected to a judicial review.

For Moore, meanwhile, the incident was particularly hard because "I had played (in the gym at the U. of R.) all my life and that was my last game there. That ruined it."

Next up for Moore may be European basketball. He is preparing for an August tour of players seeking teams. His hope is to get an offer and play a few more seasons. Ward, for one, likes his chances.

"He has enough talent to do it," Ward said.

Likewise, his parents, are optimistic.

"That's not too far-fetched," his father said.

"I think it would be beneficial for him to play there — just for the experience of traveling to another county and living there," his father said. He added that if Wakili does get on a team, "We'd see to it that we'd get to a game or two."

Moore, however, is not putting all of his basketballs in one basket. He enrolled at Fisher in part because of the communications program there. During his junior year, he interned at TV station WHEC in Rochester, and is looking forward to a career in sports broadcasting.

Even by choosing to play for Fisher, he was advancing his career Moore said. "I think it's gotten me recognition in the area," he acknowledged. "The publicity was good."

Good enough to continue practicing several hours a day?

"I just love basketball," Moore said.

His passion for the sport may just keep him on the court a few more seasons.

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SPORTS TRIVIA

This week's question:
Who won the NCAA Division I women's basketball title in 1989?

A: _____

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which is the Holy Ghost,
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and bring all things to your remembrance,
whatsoever I have said unto you."
JOHN 14:26

