

Broadside's

How Sweet it is

Chicago Tribune

(03/19/06)

“Read the final score. It was no fluke.”

Toronto Star

(03/19/06)

“Upstart George Mason turned defending NCAA basketball champion North Carolina a whole different shade of blue Sunday.”

Sports Illustrated

(03/19/06)

“[GMU] has everything it takes to play with the big boys.”

The New York Times

(03/21/06)

“This season, the Patriots thumbed their noses at being second bananas to traditional area powers Maryland and Georgetown.”

USA Today

(03/20/06)

If [Coach Larranaga’s] Patriots win four more games in the NCAA tournament, who should play him in the movie?

ESPN

(03/19/06)

D.C.’s latest bunch of lovable underdogs are headed back home to play for an Elite Eight spot in the Washington Regional.

Mason Destroys Office Brackets Nationwide with a Sweet 16 Berth

MATT EPPERS
Broadside Sports Editor

This past weekend was something like a fantasy, one that could have easily been written by Tolkien or Asimov.

George Mason University, whose postseason prospects were very much uncertain two weeks ago, went to Dayton for the NCAA Tournament winless in three previous trips to the Big Dance.

The Patriots returned to Fairfax the most successful team in school history after defeating much more heralded teams from Michigan State University and the University of North Carolina.

The wins vaulted the 11th-seeded Patriots into the Sweet 16 and earned them a date with Wichita State University Friday night at the Verizon Center in Washington, D.C.

"Coach told us when we got into the tournament teams like that -- Michigan State, North

Carolina -- they are supposed to beat us," senior guard Tony Skinn said after Sunday's 65-60 win over the Tar Heels.

"They have to make shots. The pressure is on them. Fortunately for us, we came out and played the way we have been playing all year, and we got the win," Skinn said.

There was pressure on Mason as well. Some national pundits questioned the selection committee's decision to include the Patriots in the field of 65.

When the NCAA Tournament selections and seedings were announced on March 12, Billy Packer, lead college basketball analyst for CBS Sports, very plainly said that Mason did not deserve to be in the tournament. Packer and broadcast partner Jim Nantz tersely questioned Craig Littlepage, the selection committee chairman, about Mason's inclusion.

The Patriots certainly proved the detractors wrong in sending

half of last year's Final Four, including the defending national champion, home early. Senior guard Lamar Butler said the team took the criticism in stride and used it as motivation.

"We watched them say those comments. It kind of hurt us," said Butler, who scored 13 and 18 points, respectively, against the Spartans and the Tar Heels. "We thought we deserved to be in the tournament, [but] that's their job to make those kinds of comments."

After Mason's 75-65 opening-round win over Michigan State, coach Jim Larranaga said he was not offended by Packer's remarks. However, upon defeating North Carolina two days later, he hinted that he thought the analyst's evaluation of his team was unfounded.

"They're brilliant guys [Packer and Nantz], and I'm a big fan of both of them," Larranaga said. "Ask them how many times they saw George Mason play this

year. Definitely not in person. Probably didn't even watch any video on us, so they had no idea going into Selection Sunday what George Mason is all about."

Packer and Nantz may not know what Mason is all about, but the Spartans and Tar Heels now do. The Patriots are all about defense and hustle.

Mason big men Will Thomas (18 points and 14 rebounds) and Jai Lewis (13 and eight) thoroughly outplayed Michigan State inside, and the two held Paul Davis, the Spartans' second-team All-Big Ten forward, to ten points.

The Patriots held Michigan State to 43.3 percent shooting and had a 40-24 advantage in rebounding. Mason shot nearly 60 percent from the field, led by sophomore Folarin Campbell's 21 points on 8-of-8 shooting.

"I think you have to give George Mason a lot of credit," Michigan State coach Tom Izzo said. "

The disappointing thing is that they took it at us early, kicked our butts inside. They seemed to get more of the loose balls. I thought we had a great week of practice, but we didn't get it done, and they did," Izzo said.

As their game with North Carolina started, it seemed as if the Patriots' luck had run out. The Tar Heels made seven of their first 11 shots and led 16-2 after just five minutes of play.

Mason bent, but did not break, clamping down on North Carolina defensively. The Tar Heels shot 5-of-24 the rest of the first half, and the Patriots rallied to within seven at halftime, 27-20.

An 8-0 run to start the second half gave the Patriots their first lead of the game. North Carolina turned the ball over on six of its first seven possessions and shot 37.9 percent in the second half. Mason, meanwhile, shot 53.8 percent in the second half and made 7-of-8 free throws in the final minute.

"We talked about how the first half was not a clear representation of our team," Larranaga said. "I just asked these guys to clear their minds and just take the court with the slate clean and execute like we'd been doing all season long."

"They did it from the opening seconds of the second half. We forced a couple turnovers. At their first timeout, I could see it in our eyes; we had recovered from that disastrous first half," Larranaga said.

Larranaga was certainly singing his team's praises after its second upset in as many games. However, it says much more about his Patriots team when one of the most highly-regarded coaches in college basketball echoes those praises.

"George Mason, they are a really good team," North Carolina coach Roy Williams said. "They are experienced. They guard you. We didn't do a very good job of stopping them."

player PROFILES

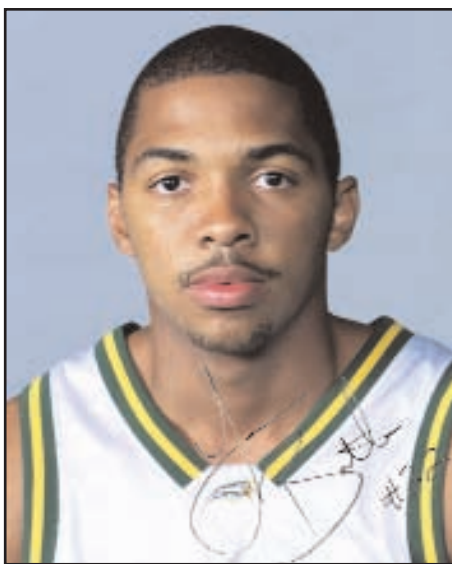


PHOTO COURTESY OF SPORTS INFORMATION

ANNA WASHINGTON
Broadside News Editor

Senior Guard

Hometown: Oxon Hill, Md.

Major: Communication

Minor: Business

After graduation plans: Play professionally for the NBA or overseas

Broadside: How has your game improved over the course of the season?

Butler: I'm more team oriented and follow coaches' game plan night in and night out.

B: Who or what influenced you the most to play basketball?

LB: My father, he played for the Bullets one year; ever since I was little he kept trying to get me to play basketball. I liked football first, but my body stopped growing so I played basketball.

B: Why did you decide to play for Mason?

LB: To have the chance to play close to home, and I had the chance to play early.

B: What are the pros and cons of being a student athlete?

LB: CONS: The stereotypes, people think we're arrogant, egocentric and cocky; I can talk about this forever. People don't get to know us because we're constantly around each other; we don't get to participate in many school activities like regular students, so people think we're so selfish; we're really not, we just don't know anybody because we're constantly doing things for basketball, traveling and stuff. PROS: People recognize you, you're like the face of the campus. It can be a good thing or a bad thing, if you do good, people praise you, if you mess up, you're kinda like a scapegoat.

B: What is your favorite aspect of basketball?

LB: Competing and having fun.

B: Who or what gets you motivated before you take the court?

LB: I motivate myself, and the fact that I want to win.

B: What kind of rituals do you have before a game?

LB: I always read a scripture from the Bible.

B: When you are not playing or watching basketball, what other sports are you interested in playing or watching?

LB: I don't have time to play other sports; I watch football and I only watch baseball when it's the World Series.

B: What is your favorite football team?

LB: [San Francisco] 49ers

B: Besides the Patriots what are your favorite college and NBA basketball teams?

LB: Mount St. Mary's because my little brother plays for them. Probably Detroit, I like the way they play and the [Miami] Heat.

Butler, Lamar

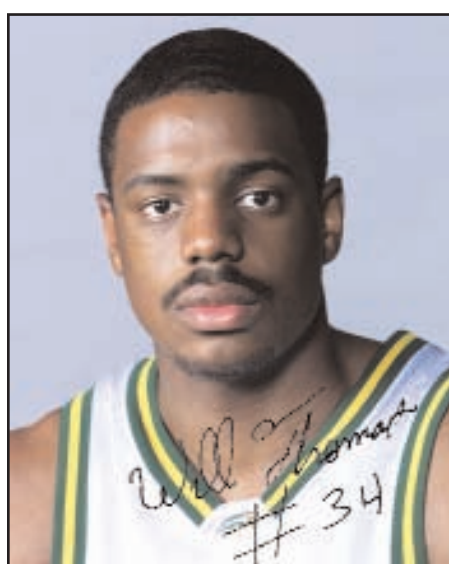


PHOTO COURTESY OF SPORTS INFORMATION

ROBIN CHEN DELOS
Broadside News Editor

Sophomore Forward

Hometown: Baltimore, Md.

Major: Sports Management

After graduation plans: Hopefully, I'll have the chance to continue my basketball career overseas or hopefully in the NBA.

Broadside: How has your game improved over the course of the season?

Thomas: It has improved offensively and defensively. The inside game has gone up a lot. Scoring and rebounding have also gone up.

B: Who or what influenced you the most to play basketball?

T: My father. The doctor said I was going to be tall; so when I was seven years old [my father] got me into basketball little league. I liked it, so I continued to play.

B: Why did you decide to play for Mason?

T: It was the right school for me, fit the way I play, good campus, good attitudes of coaches. When I met the players I liked them too,

I fit well with the team.

B: How does it feel to play for Coach Larranaga?

T: It feels good; he has proven he knows how to win, and I'm just blessed to have the chance to play for him.

B: What are the pros and cons of being a student athlete?

T: Both of them take up so much of your time ... it's almost like a job. I love to do it, but in high school, it didn't take up all your time, afterwards you go home and do whatever you want. In college, they give you study hall and tutors and we travel up and down the east coast. When we start playing games, [we] practice like an hour and a half or two hours everyday.

B: What is your favorite aspect of basketball?

T: Winning

B: Who or what gets you motivated before you take the court?

T: Music gets me motivated, when we're on the road, when they are booing us-the music gets me motivated.

B: What kind of rituals do you have before a game?

T: None

B: When you are not playing or watching basketball, what other sports are you interested in playing or watching?

T: I watch football. I used to play football in elementary and middle school.

B: What is your favorite football team?

T: [San Francisco] 49ers

B: What are your favorite college and NBA basketball teams?

T: Since I play for George Mason it's the Patriots then Duke. I don't have a favorite NBA team.

B: In your opinion, what makes Larranaga a good coach?

T: He's proven that he has a plan; he has his own way he wants his team to play, he sticks to it and he wins.

Thomas, Will

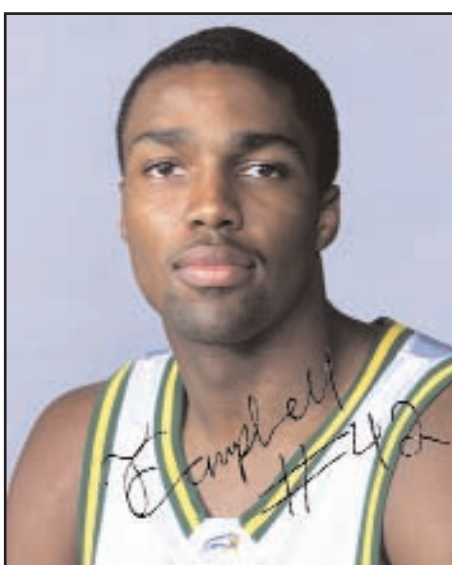


PHOTO COURTESY OF SPORTS INFORMATION

CHRIS BROOKS
Broadside Staff Writer

Sophomore Guard

Hometown: Silver Spring, Md.

Major: Undeclared (leaning towards Communication)

Broadside: How has your game improved over the course of the season?

Campbell: I became a more versatile player, and instead of just being able to take it to the basket, I can pull up and shoot mid-range jumpers and shoot the three-pointer too. Also, passing to get my teammates involved.

B: Who or what influenced you the most to play basketball?

C: I started playing basketball when I was seven years old and my brother basically put me in a boys and girls club, and after that, I just loved playing the game.

B: Why did you decide to play for Mason?

C: I wanted to go to a place where I knew we could play and have a chance to go to the NCAA tournament. I also wanted to go to a place where I could contribute and play right away as a freshman and not sit on the bench. I did that last year, played a lot, and this year, I feel a lot more comfortable.

B: What are the pros and cons of being a student athlete?

C: We have to go to classes and we also have to play basketball. There's so much going on and so much you have to do. You have to go to conditioning, you have practice, and you also got to go to class, and you've got to study. You got to do your work, and they might think that basketball players don't do our work, but we have tutors that help us out a lot. It's stressful.

B: What's your favorite aspect of basketball?

C: Just playing, I mean every aspect, just having fun out there on the court and being able to show my talent on the court.

B: Do you have any pre-game rituals?

C: I got to pray before the game. Other than that, I just go out and have fun.

B: When you are not playing or watching basketball, what other sports are you interested in playing or watching??

C: I love watching [college] football. I just love basketball. I'm just glad to watch basketball.

B: What is it like playing for Coach Larranaga?

C: Coach L is a good guy, and he's a great motivator. He's also a caring guy. When someone is feeling down, he will notice that, and he will ask you what's wrong. I mean, he's a great guy.

Campbell, Folarin

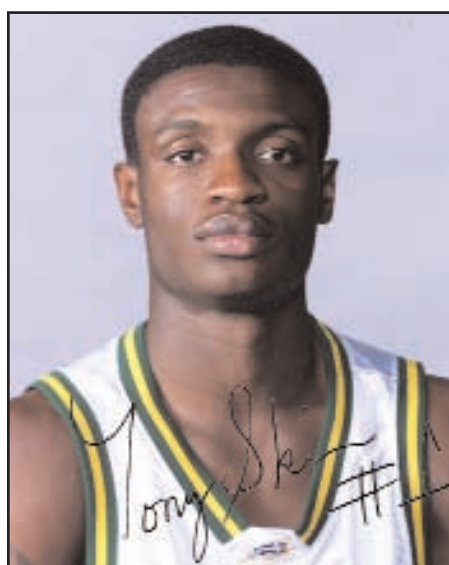


PHOTO COURTESY OF SPORTS INFORMATION

DIONNE KELSO
Broadside Staff Writer

Senior Point Guard/Shooting Guard

Hometown: Tacoma Park, Md.

Major: Communication with a concentration in Public Relations

After graduation plans: Keep playing basketball

Broadside: How has your game improved over the course of the season?

Skinn: I think I've learned to be more patient as the season has progressed.

B: Who or what influenced you the most to play basketball?

S: Basketball was a way to keep me out of trouble. I looked up to Steve Francis, who is from my hometown.

B: Why did you decide to play for Mason?

S: Mason is close to home, and I have a close friend who also went to Mason and

played ball here.

B: What are the pros and cons of being a student athlete?

S: It's all good when it comes to the sports part of it, but the school part of it is stressful because you can't really juggle both, especially at a time like this. It's crazy.

B: Who or what gets you motivated before you take the court?

S: Sometimes music and sometimes knowing that I'm going to step on the court and prove that I'm capable of playing anybody at anytime.

B: What kind of rituals do you have before a game?

S: I close my eyes and try to visualize how I'm going to play the game for about a minute or so.

B: When you are not playing or watching basketball, what other sports are you interested in playing or watching?

S: I like watching football; I like playing soccer and baseball.

B: What is your favorite football team?

S: Denver Broncos

B: What are your favorite college and NBA basketball teams?

S: GMU Patriots, and I don't really have a favorite NBA team.

B: In your opinion, why is Larranaga such a good coach?

S: He's into the game and real intense. He has a unique way of teaching and coaching, and I think that's something that a lot of coaches don't have.

Skinn, Tony

“The vitality and winning spirit being demonstrated by coach Larranaga and the team right now has completely captivated all segments of our university and our Northern Virginia region. Because of our diverse and large student population, it takes a lot to bring everyone together in a way that enhances school spirit and great pride in the team as well as the institution itself. The basketball team is doing just that.”

-President Alan Merten

All Things are Possible Through Christ

CHRISTIAN YINGLING
Broadside Editor-in-Chief

Okay folks, we have officially witnessed a modern day miracle.

Besides me, who else thought we would make it to the Sweet 16? Come on guys, let's be real, even I thought it was a long shot. However, after

an amazing second half against the University of North Carolina, this dream has definitely become a reality.

Sunday's game put Mason on the map.

Before then, we were just one of those schools in Virginia, the one that wasn't James Madison or Virginia Tech. Before Sunday, when

describing our school would have to say, "I go to Mason, the one in Fairfax, about 30 minutes away from D.C." Now, we go to George Mason University, no explanation necessary.

Watching Mason's basketball team Sunday was insane y'all, no joke! I almost peed my pants.

Our win on Sunday proved to the nation that we truly deserved to be in the Big Dance.

Wow, great job guys. Congratulations to Coach Larranaga and his Patriots, you have really made us all proud.

Apparently, all things are possible.

Spring Break Madness: My Wild Ride

Monday, March 12: Reality set in, and I realized we actually made the NCAA Tournament. This was the first time in 20 years for our conference to receive an at-large bid. Then I realized that I would be spending most of my spring break planning the trek to Dayton, Ohio to watch George Mason University play. The bus and rooms filled up quickly, and after working all week in an effort to fund my upcoming adventure, it was time to go to Dayton.

Friday, March 17: The bus left Fairfax at 8 a.m. Apparently, Dayton is kind of far from Fairfax because we arrived at about 5 p.m. With game time only an hour and a



FILE PHOTO | BROADSIDE

half away, and a bus driver who seemingly lived by the idea that three rights make a left, there was little time to waste. The start of the game was pretty much what every national

basketball expert had predicted, Michigan State University was scoring at will. Luckily for us, we couldn't miss either, as we kept it close and eventually went up by three at the half. You could feel the crowd believing that we were actually going to beat MSU with about three minutes left. When the buzzer sounded, it suddenly became okay to hug anyone wearing green and gold.

Sunday, March 19: Even though we beat one of last season's Final Four participants, everyone still predicted that Mason would get blown out by the University of North Carolina. I was much more nervous for this game, and I have a feeling that most Mason

fans felt the same way. The last minutes of the game felt like an eternity, but with 15 seconds left, it was time to celebrate once again. On the way home, we heard the Patriot Center welcome-back celebration on speaker phone, and I can tell you that we were certainly in awe of what we were hearing. We had not arrived back from the game, and a party at the Patriot Center was underway; I couldn't believe it. I was so proud of Mason.

This was, by far, the greatest spring break ever.

Dale Van Wagner is the George Mason University Student Body President

A Coach's Thoughts on the NCAA Tournament

"The very nice surprise I had when I took the floor against Michigan State, and just before they played the national anthem, I could hear the fans chanting "Let's go Mason," and when I looked up, oh my goodness, that whole section was filled."

"It surprised me that many people made the trip out to Dayton, being able to find tick-

ets and accommodations. The support for this program has grown each and every year. Right now, it's at its apex. The student support has been tremendous."

"The community support has been tremendous. School spirit has grown. I think everybody's kind of adopted this team. I'm getting e-mails from faculty and members of our

administration that are all just so ecstatic about what's going on."

"I'm just so happy for our players. I'm so happy for my coaching staff, who've worked so hard. They've put in endless hours. I'm so happy for our fans, who've supported the program. I'm so happy for the university that deserved the recognition that it's getting

now."

"We're the best-kept secret in the country. Most people don't know how beautiful George Mason is and what a great institution we have. I'm just proud to be a part of it."

Jim Larranaga is in his ninth season as head coach at George Mason University

Witnessing History at the Big Dance



FILE PHOTO | BROADSIDE

Patriot Platoon leads the crowd in cheering the Patriots to victory.

CHRIS BROOKS
Broadside Staff Writer

As a member of the Patriot Platoon, I was fortunate to witness the magic that the George Mason University men's basketball team put forth on the court. I remember sitting in Section 303, Row A, Seat 13, just praying to God that the Patriots could pull off a win.

When the clock hit zero after beating Michigan State University, the electricity in the jam-packed University of Dayton Arena was unfathomable to anybody watching from home. Experiencing first-hand a game of this magnitude cannot be felt in front of the television screen. The Mason faithful who traveled nine hours to be at the game all broke out in a cry of chants and cheers

because we knew Mason would live to play another day.

Everyone in Dayton was on cloud nine after Mason's first NCAA tournament win and looked forward to face the defending national champions. Down 16-2 in the opening minutes of the game, head coach Jim Larranaga called for a timeout. It got awfully quiet, but as fans, we knew to never give up. Mason was able to cut the University of North Carolina's lead in half, heading into the locker room, giving us the hope that Mason would make the adjustments to come from behind. I remember looking around at my Mason family and saying we will know the winners of this game in the first five minutes of the second half.

The Patriots came out of the locker room with determination, and it showed, going on an 8-0 run to take their first lead of the contest 28-27. The game clock slowly ticked down under the half way mark and anybody could tell, even from home, that the Patriots and their fans would not go quietly. The arena was probably the

loudest it had ever been when Lamar Butler hit a crazy shot in the paint with one minute left to give Mason a four-point advantage.

Victory stared us right in the face as Tony Skinn went to the free throw line going 3-4 down the stretch to seal the biggest win in Mason history. When Tyler Hansbrough missed a shot as time expired, everybody in the Mason section started jumping all over each other in jubilation, leading to shouting, cheering, hugs and many tears of joy as we knew the next stop was Washington, D.C.

"C-A-A! C-A-A!" shouted Mason's fan base, followed by "Bil-ly Pack-er!"

This experience is one that will never be forgotten, and for those who have tickets to the Sweet 16, get ready for the best atmosphere in basketball: the NCAA Tournament. I know the team appreciates everyone for traveling to witness history in the making. It does not stop until Indianapolis, where the best are crowned champions. That is where Mason fights to be.

A Mid-Major Showdown

MATT EPPERS
Broadside Sports Editor

Everyone has heard all about George Mason University's 70-67 win over Wichita State University back on Feb. 19. The national press has beat the issue into the ground leading up to the teams' Sweet 16 match-up on Friday night.

That was over a month ago, and both teams are apt to look forward. After tough wins in the opening rounds, the Patriots and Shockers are no doubt preparing themselves for another hard-fought, physical game. Still, Mason has put heavy emphasis on remaining calm and enjoying the experience of playing on college basketball's biggest stage.

"Right now, we're just enjoying it and having fun," junior Gabe Norwood said. "Coming out and beating teams like Michigan State and North Carolina was a challenge, but just doing it was that much more fun. We just want to continue to have fun and try not to put too much pressure on ourselves."

The Patriots will not be taking the Shockers lightly, though. Mason may have beaten two teams from the traditional power conferences on its way to the Sweet 16, but so did Wichita State (Seton Hall of the Big East and Tennessee of the Southeastern Conference).

Shockers' center Paul Miller, the Missouri Valley Conference Player of the Year, averages 13 points and 6.6 rebounds a game and shoots 50.9 percent from the field. Forwards P.J. Cousnard and Kyle Wilson were All-MVC Honorable Mention selections.

"They're just a good team right now, playing great basketball. If they weren't, they wouldn't be in the Sweet 16," Norwood said. "They're a very strong offensive team with Miller inside and Kyle Wilson and [Sean] Ogirri. That whole starting five is an offensive threat."

Mason entered the NCAA Tournament with one of the stingiest defenses in the country. The Patriots held Michigan State and North Carolina to a combined 39.5 percent shooting in the first two rounds. Norwood knows Mason's defense must play just as well if it plans on extending its season.

"Coach L's whole scheme is playing defense from beginning to end. We know we can score points. We have a lot of talented guys on that end of the court." Norwood said. "If we are having an off day, we definitely know we can always come out and play defense. That's our plan for the weekend."

As the tournament moves to the regional sites, Mason will enjoy the luxury of playing just a few minutes from campus at the Verizon Center in D.C. Despite what some view as a home-court advantage, at least one Patriot will not let the team be ill-prepared.

"This is the NCAA Tournament. No game is a home game," senior Tony Skinn said. "That's why it's called March Madness. Any team can beat any team on any given night."



FILE PHOTO | BROADSIDE

What's in a Mascot? How About Some Patriot Pride

JOHN GRIMSLY
Broadside Correspondent

Any George Mason University student would be hard-pressed to walk ten feet on campus without hearing about the success of their university basketball team, the Patriots. Leading all of the newly-found school spirit is team mascot Gunston. For Patrick Mazur, an art and visual technology major and the man behind the suit, all of the school spirit is paying off.

"I don't think anyone expected the underdog run we've had this year," he said. With headlines like "Team No Longer GM-Who?" in newspapers around the country, it would appear that he is right.

"I think this can be huge," Mazur said. "It's these types of events that really change schools, and from what I see, the entire Mason community is taking full advantage of it and using this as a chance to grow to our fullest potential."

Such a successful year of basketball can improve the recognition of the name of any school.

"It always means increased attention, especially during admissions," said Mark Goor, associate dean of the College of Education and Human Development. "We are all getting e-mails from alumni saying, 'We're all getting excited.'"

Mazur is thankful to all of the students and faculty

who have supported him and the entire spirit team.

"On behalf of all of the spirit people - cheer, dance, pep band and myself - we'd like to thank the administration [for going] to Dayton to support the team," said Mazur.

"For me, it's just a really great end to my college career," Mazur said. He has been doing it for three years.

Mason students take pride in their team like never before.

"I was a bit surprised to see us win against [the University of North Carolina]," freshman biology major Jimmy Rogers said. "But now that I've seen how well we can do, I think we can go a lot farther than anyone thought."

Mazur thinks we can go even farther than we already have. "I do think we can win," he said. "This team is confident but not cocky."

Sophomore government major Al Bender has confidence in the team as well. "We have the ability to be the best and beat the best. We just haven't had the publicity yet."

Wichita State now waits for Friday night, when Mason will try to continue their rags-to-riches story. Gunston will be there for this important Mason game. "I know for many of us it was a once in a lifetime opportunity, and we're just glad to be a part of Mason history," Mazur said.