

National team experience pays off for SFU forward

Source: BC Bureau Chief
by **Mason Wright**

BURNABY (CUP) - Please forgive Simon Fraser University (SFU) basketball forward Richard Anderson if the beginning of the varsity season is a bit of a let down for him.

After all, helping the national men's team secure a berth in next year's Olympics, while facing the likes of Tim Duncan and Kevin Garnett, is a privilege very few Canadians get to enjoy.

And while Anderson didn't see the floor much as a bench player in the Pan American Basketball Confederation (COPABA) Olympic qualifying tournament in July, he says he learned a lot anyway.

"It was just a different experience playing with those type of players," said Anderson, who suited up with NBA star Steve Nash among others. "I guess I've never played with that calibre of players for that long a period. These are the best players in the country."

Anderson, who appeared in six games at the qualifying tournament in Puerto Rico and also played for the fifth-place Canadian team at the Pan-Am Games, made the team in early July.

"I was probably 11th or 12th man on the

roster," he explained. "So my role was just to work hard in practice and try to bring energy to practice every day. Some guys weren't on the team because they might have been better players but they just didn't have the right attitude - they were more selfish."

Despite his role as backup to veteran Canadian forwards like Greg Newton and Peter Guarasci, Anderson averaged only 1.8 points and 1.3 rebounds in just 8.6 minutes per game in Puerto Rico.

Still, Anderson says he was pleased with his role.

"As long as I'm on the team, that's the biggest thing," he said.

Anderson's positive attitude was rewarded in the final of the qualifying tournament, when he played 15 minutes against the United States, managing three points against players like NBA superstar forward Kevin Garnett.

"It was different playing against guys who were just as strong or stronger," said Anderson. "Everyone was taller than I was, so it was really tough that way. At times it felt intimidating, but once you figured out that they're real people too and they're just playing basketball it just got simple."

National team experience pays off for

SFU forward Anderson also got the chance to play under former SFU head coach Jay Triano, who took the reigns of Team Canada in the spring. Triano says Anderson's attitude impressed the coaching staff throughout the summer, but that he made the squad for other reasons as well.

"He ran the floor extremely well, and he rebounded the basketball well, and those were two things that we were looking for in our big players as we headed in to try to qualify," said Triano.

"When we looked at what he could do with his size, we thought he'd be a real good fit for some of the South American teams that we had to face this summer."

Anderson says Triano was easy to play for because he runs a system on the national team similar to the one the SFU team use under head coach Scott Clark.

Anderson adds that Triano was a big reason Team Canada secured the second Olympic berth in the COPABA region.

"He focussed on having a team, where I think coaches in the past at the national team level just wanted the best players there," The six-foot-six SFU senior says.

Triano didn't allow professional players from Europe or the NBA to

simply show up for the tournament and play - they had to tryout like everybody else.

"The players who were on the team were willing to do that even though they had just finished their seasons overseas," added Anderson.

Meanwhile, Triano says Anderson will need to continue his development if he wants to make the Olympic team, and that his varsity season at SFU should allow him to improve.

"This year was a learning experience for him, and now we expect him to use the experience that he had this year and the year coming up at Simon Fraser to get ready to step in and contribute even more next year," the coach said. "[SFU's Clark] is going to keep me informed and he knows what Richard has to do to help us."

Anderson agrees his last season at SFU will be key, and he says his learning experience in the summer has helped him prepare.

"The last couple of years we've had trouble having a really cohesive team, and just the whole team aspect was really strong with the national team," he said. "I want to try to bring that to SFU and hopefully it'll bring us more success this year."

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