

Doug West

Talent, perseverance led to 12 NBA seasons

By NEIL RUDEL

Doug West's athletic career began as a flag football player at Garfield Elementary School.

"I loved football," he said. "Quarterback, running back ... just give me the ball."

He was not only quicker than everyone else, he was taller, and one of his close friends, Mike Pendleton, had already been playing basketball.

"We'd play Around the World," West said, "and I could never beat him."

Pendleton's dad, Don, invited Doug to play in some elementary tournaments. Pendleton helped the late Bob Seitz coach the old East End teams.

"Mr. Pendleton took me to Mr. (Bob) Seitz and one day it all clicked and it just went from there," West said.

"From there" became a springboard to stardom at Altoona High School, where he broke the all-time scoring record, to Villanova University, where he scored 2,000 points and to the NBA, where he lasted 12 seasons.

His pro tenure matches Ed Flanagan for the longest in Blair County history.

West retired after the 2002 season and is now living in Wheeling, W.Va. He spent the last three years as a volunteer assistant at Canon-McMillan High School, where former high school teammate Scott Colombo is an assistant coach.

The experience has helped West appreciate the kind of facilities, coaching and grass-roots organization that long separated Altoona.

"St. Therese's would have a tournament. St. Luke's, the Jewish Center," he said. "There were different things for kids to do. Looking back on it, they were trying to teach us about the game and a little bit about life. It also helped with Skip Dry and the (Mansion Park) Summer League that we were playing against older people. That helped our games grow. We were fortunate."

Part of West's foundation included playing on the Hill, where older players such as Wendell Davis, Victor Thomas and Candy Futrell would toughen him.

"I can remember when they wouldn't let me play," he said. "They'd say, 'you're too young.' Then there was a time when I came back and I told them they're not strong enough to guard me now. The tables had turned."

Johnny Moore took an interest in him. The first Altoona player to make the NBA, the former San Antonio Spurs standout would return in the summer and passed his work ethic onto West.

"I can recall Johnny knocking on my door at 8-9 in the morning and saying, 'c'mon, young fella,' and



Doug played nine seasons with the Timberwolves and three with the Vancouver Grizzlies.

we'd go running," West said. "He showed me what he had to do to keep playing."

West went from Keith Junior High to Altoona, where, as a senior, he led a super-talented team that included Mike Iuzzolino, Craig Curry and Bob Bradfield to a 27-0 record before a Western final loss to Brashear.

"We had something special," West said. "Mike being able to shoot the ball like he could, Bobby as a point guard who could dunk, Craig doing what he

could. Scott (Colombo), Todd Little, Frank Dicken ... everyone had a special part in the development of that team."

West is often reminded of the Brashear game by Darelle Porter, who played on the team along with future West Virginia quarterback Major Harris.

Altoona was caught looking ahead at an anticipated matchup with Carlisle, led by Jeff Lebo and Billy Owens, in the state final.

"I had probably already counted the Brashear game because I was like that," West said.

Following an intense recruitment, West picked Villanova over Pitt and calls the choice "by far" the best he could have made.

At 'Nova, he met his wife, Wuela. The couple now has two children — Tyson (7) and Braedyn (4).

"Coming from Altoona, I pretty much grew up around a diverse group of people — white people, black people," he said. "I could have gone to Pitt and succeeded, but when I went to Villanova and saw the campus, it wasn't as much of a city school and the diversity on campus was the best reason."

He also saw a father-figure coach in Rollie Massimino, who challenged him immediately.

"He told me freshmen don't start," West said. "I wanted to prove him wrong."

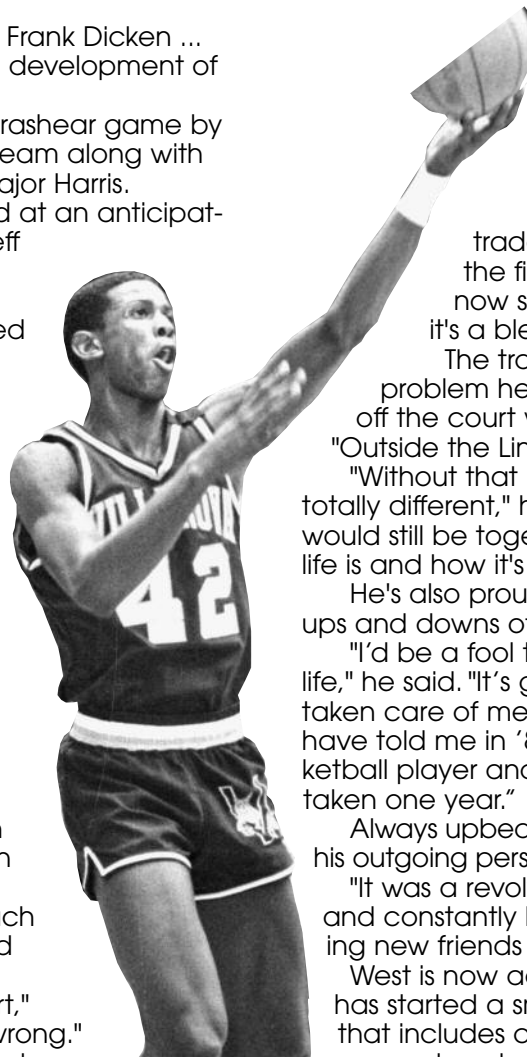
West did, starting from Day 1 and helping 'Nova to a pair of NCAA Tournament appearances, including the Elite Eight as a junior.

"Coach Mass took us under his wing — and not just me, everyone on the team," West said. "Different events and things at his house. On the court, he was tough as hell. Off the court, he was the nicest person. Just don't drive with him!"

Massimino will serve as West's Hall of Fame presenter, something West called "very special."

"I'm very proud of him," Massimino said. "A lot of our kids — Doug, Harold Pressley, Eddie Pinkney, Rory Sparrow — were more than just basketball players. They got their degrees, and they should be a tribute to their families and the university. You don't stay in the NBA as long as Doug did if they don't like you."

West was selected in the second round of the '89 draft by the then-expansion Minnesota Timberwolves. He stayed there nine years, serving as team captain and averaging a career-high 19.3 points per game in the 1992-



93 season, when he scored a career-high 38 points in one game.

"I thought I'd be there forever, retire there and go into the front office," he said.

He was disappointed by a 1998 trade to Vancouver, where he spent the final three years of his career. But he now sees the big picture and believes it's a blessing.

The trade helped him address an alcohol problem he had developed. His success story off the court was a subject of a recent ESPN "Outside the Lines" profile.

"Without that bump in the road, my life would be totally different," he said. "I don't know if Wuela and I would still be together. I'm very proud of where my life is and how it's going."

He's also proud that he was able to endure the ups and downs of 12 NBA seasons.

"I'd be a fool to say it wasn't the best thing in my life," he said. "It's given me everything that I have. It's taken care of me financially. If somebody would have told me in '88-89, you'll be a professional basketball player and you'll play for 12 years ... I'd have taken one year."

Always upbeat with a quick smile, West believes his outgoing personality contributed to his longevity.

"It was a revolving door of coaches and players and constantly having new teammates and making new friends and adjusting," he said.

West is now adjusting to life after the game. He has started a small company, called "Win By 2," that includes college preparation, player development and a line of mesh products.

Most of all, he's content to enjoy his family and the fruits of his labor.

"My wife followed me for 12 years," he said.

"Tyson wants to learn how to play. I want to be there for them."

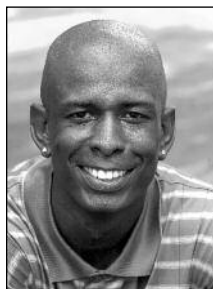
West comes from an athletic family. He got his height from his mother Flo's grandfather and her

brother, Greg Campbell, was a standout running back at Altoona who went to Louisville.

Doug's dad, Frank, played football at Altoona High and "he'd come out in his cowboy boots" and shoot around on the playground.

West was inducted into Philadelphia's Big Five Hall of Fame, but he sees this honor in a different light.

"As the induction nears, it holds a very special part of my heart," he said. "Altoona is where it all started, and being recognized by your hometown, there's nothing more special."



West bio

Sport: Basketball.

Hometown: Altoona.

College: Villanova.

Hall of Fame achievement:

Played 12 years in the NBA; former Villanova standout.

Current residence: Wheeling, W.Va.