

## INDUCTEE PROFILE



Curtis (left) played five seasons in England and was a prolific scorer with the Nissan Bears.

# *Miller shot his way to glory*

## **JUCO All-American made career in Europe**

By Josh Langenbacher

Curtis Miller's love of basketball took him from the streets of Altoona to the streets of Europe.

And tonight, Miller's windy, twisty road playing the game he played from dawn to dusk on some of the city's most weathered courts will reach another destination: the Blair

County Sports Hall of Fame.

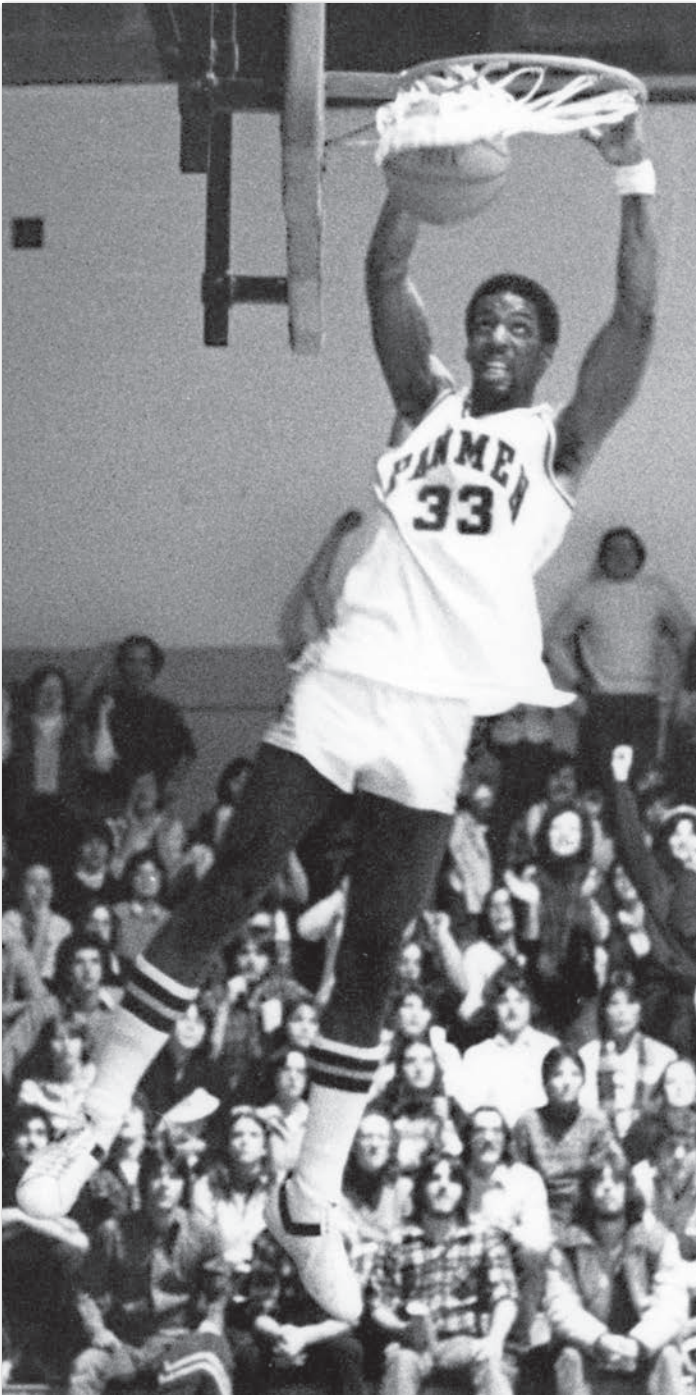
Miller, an Altoona Area High School standout, carved out five seasons playing in Europe along with participation in summer league camps with the NBA's Cleveland Cavaliers and Los Angeles Lakers.

His full indoctrination to the hardwood came begrudgingly, and

it came at the behest of 2006 Hall of Fame inductee John Swogger.

Miller, who gave consideration to following in the steps of his brother, Alfie, as the drum major for AAHS, short-circuited that ambition after Swogger caught a glimpse of Miller's potential.

*(Continued on page 28)*



Curtis helped lead the New Hampshire Penmen to the NCAA Division II quarterfinals in 1981.

*(Continued from page 27)*

"He said, 'Look, you can't be no drum major,'" Miller recalled. "We're going to make you play basketball. When I was in ninth grade, he said, 'You got go get out of that band.'"

So Miller did, without regret.

After becoming a third-team junior college All-American at Broome Community College in Binghamton, N.Y., Miller finished his college eligibility at Division II New Hampshire before latching on with the Worthing Bears based in Britain. Miller played overseas professionally for five years, averaging

as high as 33 points per game and being named to several European All-Star teams.

Miller's main base was in London, but five years of playing in Europe meant electrifying crowds in places like Italy, Spain, Switzerland, Germany, Holland, Sweden, Belgium and Scotland as the Europeans became captivated by Americans.

For a continent just becoming introduced to basketball, the allure of Americans who started playing the game nearly a century earlier kept turnstiles active at gyms across Europe.

"An American coming over there doing what they needed to do, dunking and shooting and passing, they loved that stuff," Miller said. "Their game was just developing. They never saw that type of stuff."

Miller said he was treated well — since the Worthing Bears' sponsor was Nissan, team members were provided with a car, and a house was also included in addition to his salary — and camps his team ran would attract 300-400 kids wanting to learn the ball skills Americans had perfected.

Still, the experience was not without its pressures. Since European teams were limited to only two Americans on the roster unless the American they signed had a dual citizenship, which is not permitted until after five years of residency, Americans not meeting expectations were commonly cut to make room for another American player.

Ironically, Miller's success played a part in what brought him home. Miller collapsed on the court at a practice in Belgium, collapsed during an all-star game in Sweden days later, went back to London and collapsed during another all-star trip.

Doctors attributed it to something he ate, but it was enough for Miller to pack his bags.

"I had migraine headaches, stomach pain and a severe case of food poisoning," Miller said. "That's when I said I was done."

Miller's European experience came after his college coach at New Hampshire, Tom Sullivan, called him "surely one of the founding stones" of the program. Miller contributed to a pair of Northeast Regional titles (1979-81) at New Hampshire, and the 1981 squad advanced to the national



## Miller bio

**Sport:** Basketball

**High school:** Altoona

**College:** New Hampshire

**Hall of Fame achievement:** Curtis played

five pro seasons in England and was a European all-star. He was a third-team JUCO All-American at Broome Community College in Binghamton, N.Y., then went to New Hampshire, where he averaged 17.3 points in two years. He participated in two NBA Summer League camps with Cleveland and the Lakers (1981-82).

**Current residence:** Altoona

Division II quarterfinals. In 2012, that team was inducted into New Hampshire's Hall of Fame.

The 6-foot-7 Miller wasn't on campus long before making an impression borne out of his self-confidence.

"We were reviewing scrimmage tape with him, and I said, 'Curtis, you're shooting the ball well, but you're not getting any rebounds,'" Sullivan said. "He said, 'Coach, I shoot. I don't get rebounds.'"

Miller was true to his word: Sullivan recalled a game against Quinnipiac when Miller tested the willingness of Quinnipiac's defenders to take him seriously when he crossed half court.

"They went into a zone, and Curtis was right in front of someone," Sullivan said. "It was almost at half court. Some kids yelled to him, 'Good, good, shoot it from out there all day.' Curtis missed, but he passed by me and said, 'Don't worry, coach, I'll make the next one.' And he did. And maybe about three plays later, in the same spot again, kids yelled at him to shoot it. And he made four of five.

"Curtis was a deep shooter before there really were deep shooters."

The man who recommended Miller to New Hampshire, longtime college coach Joe DeAntonio, said he believes Miller would have made the NBA if the 3-point line had been in existence.

And the man who nominated Miller, fellow Hall of Famer Art Taneyhill, said Miller's ball skills and commitment were unparalleled.

"He spent hours and hours doing things like ball drills that he incorporated with rope jumping to develop individual skills," Taneyhill said. "He spent a lot of time shooting. A lot of times when you're dedicated, you spend a lot of time by yourself. Not a whole lot of people want to rebound for you."

Miller described Taneyhill as a formative influence from an academic standpoint. It was Taneyhill who directed Miller to Broome Community College because of a mutual acquaintance at the Binghamton, N.Y., school.

Taneyhill, a guidance counselor



**His New Hampshire team was enshrined in the school's Hall of Fame in 2012. Here he's joined by teammates Carlton Lee (left) and Chris Delgudice.**

at the time, noticed Miller was "a little behind, so he had to make some adjustments."

Beyond Taneyhill, Miller's basketball career was shaped by some of the more accomplished players and coaches Blair County has produced.

Fiesty pickup games played on many of the city's more well-worn courts with peers like Michael and Charlie Johnson, Johnny Moore, Pat Nagle, Larry McAleer and Randy Allen meant "everyone took their scars," Miller said, both figuratively and literally.

"It was a roughhouse," Miller said. "I mean, we played. It's not like it is today. We played until the street lights came on. There were times we'd take a break and go out at 8 o'clock at night and play a game."

In between playing pickup games, Miller would squeeze in visits to Tony Labriola's house, where Miller "used to take my notebook to his house every stinking day and shoot 500 shots a day. He'd record all my shots in a notebook."

As Miller sharpened his skills into

his junior year, the competitive streak he developed playing recreationally stuck with him. His Keith Junior High squad won the Inter County Conference Championship, and Swogger noticed the potential in the group.

"John Swogger was the type of person who, if you were a sophomore and could beat out a senior, he'd start you," Miller said. "That's what influenced me. When we won the ICC championship at Keith, he said, 'Look, you guys can take a senior's spot. I don't have no favoritism. If you can take a senior's spot, you can come and get it.' That's what influenced me a lot."

Many of those who came before Miller have already been enshrined into the Hall, and Miller is thrilled to be joining his peers.

"Oh, it means a lot," he said. "When I first got the call, I was shocked. It's truly a great honor. I'm going in with great people, and it's truly a great honor because so many people from before me are in as well. I'm very happy to be inducted."