



Streat Smarts

Scarlet Raptor Brian Streater proves he's a fighter—just like his grandfather, “Jersey Joe” Walcott.

Long before Brian Streater set foot on the Rutgers-Camden campus, he knew about The Streak. After all, a national media avalanche had descended on the obscure NCAA Division III basketball program in 1995 when the Pioneers—now the Scarlet Raptors—lost more consecutive games (85) than any NCAA program in history. And when former provost Walter Gordon scrapped the program at the end of the season, student protests and media pressure, including a touching *Sports Illustrated* story that focused on “team character” and “lessons learned,” brought it back with a renewed commitment: Longtime assistant coach and former Pioneer standout Ray Pace (CCAS’79) was named head coach and granted full-time status.

Finally, on January 8, 1996, the streak ended at 117 when the Raptors beat Bloomfield College, 77-72. The hoopsters even won another game before the season ended. The future suddenly looked rosy. Pace now had more time to devote to recruiting and practice sessions—and it showed. “Last year we won five games but were in every game but two. This year we’ll be even better,” says Streater, a 6’ 1” sophomore guard whose grandfather was “Jersey Joe” Walcott, the former heavyweight boxing champion.

Streater’s optimism is understandable. He and his backcourt mate, James Washington,

ALTHOUGH BRIAN STREATER ALSO EXCELLED IN FOOTBALL, EVERYONE SAID HE WAS TOO SMALL FOR THE GAME—EVERYONE, THAT IS, EXCEPT “JERSEY JOE.” HE TOLD HIS GRANDSON IT WAS THE SIZE OF HIS HEART THAT MATTERED.

Scarlet Sports by Bill Glovin

BOX SCORE

It's no accident that Rutgers Stadium seems more fan-friendly this fall. In one end zone, a new inscription reads "The Birthplace of College Football." In the other, hedges and flowers are shaped to form "RU." Other improvements include colorful banners throughout the stadium and red- and black-painted stripes on the walls of the first and second decks. Football isn't the only sport receiving athletics director Bob Mulcahy's attention. He has added scholarships in Olympic sports, with 14 going to women, and is working on building a women's basketball network.

combined to average more than 40 points a game and bring the Raptors' win total to five. Streater's ability to penetrate, score, and play defense took the pressure off Washington, who had been double- and triple-teamed by opponents. For Streater, the fact that he was even playing basketball—much less excelling—on the collegiate level was his own Cinderella story.

Back when Rutgers-Camden was gaining notoriety for The Streak, Streater was having his own dark days. A year out of Pennsauken High School, where he had been the school's all-time leading scorer, Streater was unemployed, broke, and the new father of an infant son, Tajh. Looking back on high school, Streater says

that "my grades were terrible and my priorities were all screwed up. I was a good athlete so everyone let me slide, but I know now that they weren't doing me any favors."

Streater got a job maintaining the locker rooms at a Jewish community center in Cherry Hill, but he soon realized that only a college education could assure a good future for himself and his son. His cousin, Vincent Cream, a Rutgers-Camden student and one of the basketball program's biggest supporters, approached Pace about bringing Streater to campus. "I knew about Brian in high school, but his grades were terrible," says Pace. "Brian told me that he would do whatever it took to turn his life around. I told him that if he wanted to come to Rutgers, he would first have to enroll at Camden County College to prove to himself and to the Rutgers admissions office that he could cut it."

At Camden County, Streater passed on playing basketball so he could concentrate solely on academics. With a successful first semester behind him and pressure mounting to prove that he still had game, he joined the school's team for its final six contests. All he did was average nearly 27 points a game.

Streater's solid performance on and off the court earned him acceptance to Rutgers-Camden. Last season, he, Washington (a former high school rival), and first-year center Joel Douglas soon made the Raptors respectable in the New Jersey Athletic Conference, arguably the toughest NCAA Division III conference in the country. Streater was named Second-Team All-Conference and was second in the conference in scoring (20.9) and steals (2.9). "If we had a few more wins, I think Brian might have been the conference MVP," says Pace, adding that Streater's game reminds him of 1997 NBA Rookie of the Year Allen Iverson. "His impact on our team was enormous. Brian could compete on the Division I level, and he may someday play professionally."

The Raptors face some setbacks as this season tips off: Pace's resignation 10 days before practice was set to begin leaves the head coach position—once again part-time—open. With a part-time coach, shorter, evening practices will be necessary. And with Washington and Douglas transferring to Camden County for financial reasons, Streater fears that "if they're not back for next semester, we may be headed for another streak."

But Streater's not one to give in: After all, his grandfather instilled in him a fighting spirit. Walcott, who once knocked down Joe Louis twice in a fight before losing a 15-round decision, won the heavyweight title at the age of 37 in 1951. In 1994, four years after entering the Boxing Hall of Fame, Walcott died. At the time, the legendary boxer was living with Streater's family. Streater says that Walcott was the closest thing he ever had to a father: "I loved his stories; he used to tell me about all the great people he had met—the Pope, Queen Elizabeth, President Truman, Muhammad Ali."

Streater believes he will need Jersey Joe's tenacity if he is to meet his college goals. Last semester, he lived on campus but felt too distracted by the social pressures that go along with dormitory life. To keep his focus on academics, Streater moved back home with his mother, Sister Ahdahmeeah Ali-Bey, who is Walcott's daughter, and his toddler son. His family, says Streater, has always been a tremendous support. "I haven't declared my major, but I'm leaning toward social work," he says. "I have a message to offer young people: Don't make the same mistakes that I made." □

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ahntay Jones, a 6' 5", 210-pound shooting guard from Hamilton Square, is expected to tickle the twine this season for the Scarlet Knights men's basketball squad. Named First-Team All-State by both the AP and the Newark Star-Ledger, Jones was MVP of the North-South All-Star Game played at Rutgers in March.



Ken Kesey first brought attention to the Merry Pranksters through his Magic Bus. Rutgers hopes to do the same for its athletics teams with this new eye-catcher.