It's Marcus' chance to 'make a name'

Western center now a long way from Wal-Mart

By C. L. BROWN
The Courier-Journal

BOWLING GREEN, Ky. — It's hard to believe, but the 6-foot-7 teen-ager working in Wal-Mart's pet section didn't play basketball. Chris Marcus grew another three inches between his sophomore and junior years of high school in Charlotte, N.C., but he still was nothing more than the tallest clerk in the store.

In a few short years he has gone from being stared at in Wal-Mart to being checked out by National Basketball Association scouts.

Marcus, now a 7-1 college junior, has led Western Kentucky into its first NCAA Tournament appearance since 1995.

The Hilltoppers (24-6) will face Florida (23-6) at 3 p.m. EST Friday in a South Region opener in New Orleans.

Marcus still finds it all hard to believe. Even though he lived in the shadow of Tobacco Road, he never thought much of March Madness, much less figured he'd be a part of it. And a future in the NBA? His dream was merely to have Charlotte Hornets season tickets someday.

"It just goes to show I've put a lot of hard work into it, and it's starting to pay off," he said.

Marcus is known throughout serious basketball circles, but he's still relatively unknown to the average fan outside Bowling Green. That could change Friday in the Superdome.

"I'm looking to make a name not just for me, but the university," he said. "This tournament is going to give me an opportunity to do that."

Not that he's the kind of guy who seeks special attention. Before working at Wal-Mart, he was a grocery cashier. Weary of customers constantly looking...
Continued from Page E 1

up and asking if he played basket-
ball, he asked the manager for a po-
sition in the back of the store, then
quit when his request was refused.

Marcus is the sixth of seven chil-
dren born to James Sr. and Louis-
ville Marcus. His father, now re-
tired, worked as a janitor for the
Boy Scouts of America, and his
mother was primarily a housewife.
They stressed education, and each
of Chris' older siblings has a college
degree.

"They're my motivating force to
get through school," Marcus said.

The family also helped him stay
grounded. He didn't play basketball
until his senior year at Olympic
High School, so he never experi-
cenced the pampering from summer
coaches and shoe company-spon-
sored camps that goes to players
with potential.

But the downside was that he
never experienced being away from
home: Humble and shy, he shunned
attention when he first arrived at
Western — even from his team-
ates.

"He didn't want to be around a
lot of people; he just kept to him-
self," said guard Derek Robinson.
"He has matured with all of us. He's
just a great guy to be around."

Marcus even has turned into
something of a prankster. He's been
known to turn the lights off while a
 teammate is taking a shower, and
he's fond of busting into the dorm
room of Robinson, Tremain Rowles
and Raynardo Curry and doing his
best World Wrestling Federation
imitation.

"It just goes to show I've put a lot
of hard work into it, and it's starting
to pay off."

- Chris Marcus

"Sometimes he gets the best of
us," Rowles said. "It's hard getting
the big fella down."

But at one time Marcus contem-
plated transferring to Charlotte so
he could be near his family. He
called home to get his parents' per-
spective and was told to stay put.

"That conversation was about loy-
alty," James Marcus said. "We're
close-knit, but Charlotte didn't offer
him a scholarship. They didn't see
the potential he had. Western of-
fered him a scholarship and an op-
portunity to play."

The Hilltoppers' 10-day trip to Eu-
rope last May was the clincher.
Marcus returned with a new appre-
ciation for his teammates and the
courage to grow up on his own.

"I realized Western Kentucky was
the best for me," he said.

The Hilltoppers didn't lose him to
Charlotte, and they won't lose him
easily to the NBA, either. Marcus has
his eyes focused on graduating.

"I plan on coming back to earn
my degree," he said. "I've worked
so hard to get here and put myself
in a position academically to earn
my degree. It would be such a loss
to make it this far and not finish."

Western coach Dennis Felton
knows quality big men, having
coached two first-round draft picks
— Eric Williams and Austin Cro-
shore — while an assistant at Provi-
dence.

"He has more potential than
those players," Felton said.

Scouts for more than half of the
NBA teams have visited E. A. Diddle
Arena to see him play, and some
have made repeat trips. But Marcus
doesn't have any delusions about
his game. He knows there is room
for improvement.

"At first it was a real exciting
thing, but it just comes with the ter-
ritory," he said. "The more the team
wins, the more people are interest-
ed. (My parents) were pretty ex-
cited, but they told me to keep a
level head and just focus on the task
at hand, and that's what I've been
doing."

Marcus leads Western in scoring
(16.3) and rebounding (11.9) and has
blocked more than three shots per
game. He was named the Sun Belt
Conference Player of the Year, the
Defensive Player of the Year and the
Most Outstanding Player in the
conference tournament.

He definitely will need to be a
force against third-seeded Florida if
the No. 14-seeded Hilltoppers are to
have a chance.

"He's vital to our game," said
senior guard Nashon McPherson.
"He's our No. 1, No. 2 and No. 3 op-
ton."
Marcus focused on degree

WKU center plans on going into NBA after graduation

By OJ STAPLETON
The Daily News
ojstapleton@bgdailynews.com

Chris Marcus is working hard this summer to make sure he graduates in four years.

The Western Kentucky center sat out his freshman season as a non-qualifier and if he graduates in four years, he can apply for an extra year of basketball eligibility.

So far, Marcus has already passed two classes, and he is currently working on two more. Marcus skipped tryouts for the World University Games and the prestigious Nike All-American camp, so he can get his classes in.

If he keeps it up, he should have no problem getting a fourth year of eligibility, but for the first time since becoming a hot NBA prospect, Marcus has said he doesn't plan on coming back for a fourth season.

"I plan on making the jump. I want people to know that. I would love for this to be my last year," Marcus said.

If he comes out after next season, Marcus will likely be a top 10 pick, but there has been speculation that if he stayed an additional year, he could be the top choice in the 2003 draft.

That isn't likely to get Marcus to stick around for another season, however.

"That would be hard. There is so much pressure with being the No. 1 pick," Marcus said. "Everybody remembers the No. 1 pick. They remember the No. 2 or No. 3 or No. 4, but not like that."

Marcus said he had some minor doubts about his decision to stay in school in the days leading up to the June 27 draft.

"Once I get my degree and I know I can come back here for another year if I need to - that helps me," Marcus said. "If I don't have the year I hope I have, or if I have the feeling where I think I need another year to get better at basketball, then I'll come back and put it on hold for another year."

"I think it was D-Rob (Derek Robinson) that said, 'Do you realize that if you wanted to, you could?'"
Marcus has been called a role model because of his commitment to education over basketball. He said he thinks the fact that he didn’t really take up the sport until his senior year of high school probably has a lot to do with that.

“I guess I’ve realized that there’s more to life than just basketball,” Marcus said. “Even though basketball has opened up a lot of doors for me and given me a chance to play in the NBA, I believe my life will be a lot better off once I get my degree and get school out of the way.”
BLUE RIBBON YEARBOOK PICKS HILTOPPERS 35TH IN THE NATION; MARCUS FIRST-TEAM ALL-AMERICA

Bowling Green, Ky. — Blue Ribbon College Basketball Yearbook has released its 2001-02 preseason poll and All-America Team listing Western Kentucky 35th on its Top 40 and placing Hilltopper senior center Chris Marcus on its First-Team All-America squad.

Defending national champion Duke tops Blue Ribbon's poll for the second consecutive year.

The Blue Devils, who won their third national championship under veteran coach Mike Krzyzewski last season, were a clear choice for No. 1 in the poll. Illinois is second, Kentucky third, Maryland fourth and Florida fifth to round out the top five. The second five is highlighted by the presence of three Big 12 schools, No. 7 Missouri, No. 8 Kansas and No. 10 Iowa.

The 2001-02 Blue Ribbon College Basketball Yearbook TOP 40

1. Duke
2. Illinois
3. Kentucky
4. Maryland
5. Florida
6. UCLA
7. Missouri
8. Kansas
9. Virginia
10. Iowa
11. St. Joseph's
12. Connecticut
13. Temple
14. Memphis
15. Stanford
16. Oklahoma
17. Syracuse
18. North Carolina
19. Oklahoma State
20. Texas
21. Georgetown
22. Cincinnati
23. Tennessee
24. Indiana
25. Arkansas
26. Boston College
27. Arizona
28. Michigan State
29. Ole Miss
30. Fresno State
31. Wyoming
32. Ohio State
33. Utah
34. Alabama
35. WESTERN KENTUCKY
36. Purdue
37. Southern Cal
38. Providence
39. Wake Forest
40. Xavier

2001-02 Blue Ribbon All-America Teams

First Team
Brett Nelson, 6-4 JR, Florida
Jason Williams, 6-2 JR, Duke
CHRIS MARCUS, 7-1 SR, WESTERN KENTUCKY
Casey Jacobsen, 6-6 JR, Stanford
Tayshaun Prince, 6-9 SR, Kentucky

Second Team
Frank Williams, 6-3 JR, Illinois
Juan Dixon, 6-3 SR, Maryland
Udonis Haslem, 6-8 SR, Florida
Jared Jeffries, 6-9 SO, Indiana
Kareem Rush, 6-6 JR, Missouri

Third Team
Troy Bell, 6-1 JR, Boston College
Keith Bogans, 6-5 JR, Kentucky
Carlos Boozer, 6-9 JR, Duke
Lonny Baxter, 6-8 SR, Maryland
Jason Kapono 6-7 JR, UCLA

Fourth Team
Marvin O'Connor, 6-4 SR, St. Joseph's
Mike Dunleavy, 6-8 JR, Duke
Dan Gadzuric, 6-11 SR, UCLA
Sam Clancy, 6-7 SR, Southern Cal
David West, 6-8 JR, Xavier

For Ticket Information on all Hilltopper sports, contact the WKU Ticket Office in E.A. Diddle Arena
(800-5-BIG-RED or 270-745-5222)
VISA, Master Card and Discover welcome
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE / October 16, 2001
Men's Basketball / Contact: Jackie Bradford, Atlanta Tipoff Club (770-476-9700); Paul Just, WKU SID

WKU's Chris Marcus a Candidate for Naismith Player of the Year Award
PRE-SEASON CANDIDATES NAMED FOR NAISMITH COLLEGE BASKETBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR AWARDS

ATLANTA, GA, (October 16, 2001) — Jason Williams of Duke University and Sue Bird from University of Connecticut head the list of pre-season candidates for the 2001-2002 Naismith College Basketball Player of the Year Awards. Jackie Bradford, President of the Atlanta Tipoff Club, announced the candidates today.

Williams, a 6'2", Junior, Guard, from Plainfield, NJ, is the nation's 12th leading returning scorer with 1,333 career points. He is averaging 18.3 points, 3.7 rebounds, 6.3 assists and 2.2 steals in his career. Jason has scored double figures in 66 of 73 games and has eight career double-doubles. Williams set Duke's single-season scoring record with 841 points which had stood at 831 since 1951.

Bird, the 5'9", Senior, Guard, from Syossett, NY, is averaging 10.4 points, 4.5 assists, and 2.5 rebounds in her career. She led her team in minutes played with 27.7 per game. Bird is third at UConn for most assists in a season with 169. Sue recorded a career high in three-pointers with five in a game last season.

Casey Jacobsen (Stanford) and Frank Williams (Illinois) were the second and third-leading vote-getters, respectively, among the men's pre-season Naismith candidates, while Chantelle Anderson (Vanderbilt) and LaToya Thomas (Mississippi State) rounded out the top-three candidates for women.

The Naismith Awards program, now in its 34th year, honors the outstanding college basketball players in the United States. The awards program was founded by the Atlanta Tipoff Club, an organization dedicated to recognizing the achievements of student-athletes in basketball.

The candidates were selected by a vote of the Board of Selectors comprised of leading basketball coaches, journalists and basketball analysts. Members of the board were asked to name top male and female players who are most likely to be in contention for the award.

"Both the men's and women's fields, from top to bottom, are extremely talented," said Bradford. "The race for the Naismith Award will once again be very competitive and exciting."

The pre-season candidates for the Naismith Awards, listed in alphabetical order, are as follows:

2001-02 Pre-Season Naismith Candidates

Male Candidates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lonny Baxter, Maryland</th>
<th>Troy Bell, Boston College</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keith Bogans, Kentucky</td>
<td>Carlos Boozer, Duke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick Collison, Kansas</td>
<td>Sam Clancy, USC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chris Duhon, Duke</td>
<td>Mike Dunleavy, Duke</td>
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<td>LaVell Blanchard, Michigan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caron Butler, Connecticut</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Juan Dixon, Maryland</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melvin Ely, Fresno State</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reggie Evans, Iowa
Udonis Haslem, Florida
Jason Kapono, UCLA
Marvin O’Conner, St. Joseph’s
Luke Recker, Iowa
David West, Xavier

Drew Gooden, Kansas
Casey Jacobson, Stanford
Chris Marcus, Western Kentucky
Chris Owens, Texas
Darius Rice, Miami - FL
Frank Williams, Illinois

Lynn Greer, Temple
Jared Jeffries, Indiana
Brett Nelson, Florida
Tayshawn Prince, Kentucky
Kareem Rush, Missouri
Jason Williams, Duke

Female Candidates
Chantelle Anderson, Vanderbilt
Sue Bird, Connecticut
Danielle Crockrom, Baylor
Catrina Frierson, Louisiana Tech
Sheila Lambert, Baylor
Brandi McCain, Florida
Nicole Powell, Stanford
Diana Taurasi, Connecticut
Ayana Walker, Louisiana Tech
Shaquala Williams, Oregon

Alana Beard, Duke
Swin Cash, Connecticut
Stacey Dales, Oklahoma
Deanna Jackson, UAB
Kara Lawson, Tennessee
Tawana McDonald, Georgia
Alicia Ratay, Notre Dame
Nikki Teasley, North Carolina
Angie Welle, Iowa State
Shereka Wright, Purdue

Lucienne Berthieu, Old Dominion
LaNeishca Caufield, Oklahoma
Chrissy Floyd, Clemson
Gwen Jackson, Tennessee
Takeisha Lewis, Louisiana Tech
Plenette Pierson, Texas Tech
Michelle Snow, Tennessee
LaToya Thomas, Mississippi St.
Tamika Williams, Mississippi St.
DeTrina White, LSU

Last year’s Naismith Award recipients were Shane Battier (Duke University) and Ruth Riley (University of Notre Dame). The first recipient of the male Naismith Award was Lew Alcindor (Kareem Abdul-Jabbar) of UCLA in 1969. Other college player of the year recipients include many NBA standouts such as Bill Walton, Larry Bird, Michael Jordan, Patrick Ewing, and Christian Laettner. The women’s Naismith Award, first presented in 1983 to Anne Donovan of Old Dominion, includes recipients such as three-time winner Cheryl Miller of USC, two-time honorees Clarissa Davis of Texas, Chamique Holdsclaw of Tennessee and Dawn Staley of Virginia.

Please visit our website at www.naismithawards.com for more information on our awards.

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Note: WKU’s Chris Marcus had earlier been named to the John Wooden Award Preseason All-America Team, a list of the 50 candidates for that college basketball Player of the Year honor.
BOWLING GREEN, Ky. - Chris Marcus is in no hurry. The best big man in college basketball has sold his lottery ticket this long, why not another year? And, if he feels like it, another year after that?

What is he going to do, shrink? Seven-foot-one isn't going anywhere. The NBA can wait. What good is being a 285-pound slab of clay if there is no one to mold it? What is the point of being the world's largest sponge if there isn't the time to absorb? The way Marcus figures, staying at Western Kentucky another year, possibly two, is the only way he can (begin ital) expand. (end ital)

That was the whole point back when Marcus reluctantly agreed to slip on a basketball uniform for the first time as a senior at Olympic High School in Charlotte, N.C. Until then he was merely the world's most stub­born 7-footer, happily cleaning up after fish and dogs in a Wal-Mart pet department - and, at his height, the ideal employee for stocking those hard-to-reach upper shelves - while turning away repeated overtures from Olympic's coach and players. The world is littered with 7-footers who are no more basketball players than the fans who taunt them. Marcus seemed more interested in adding to his collection of video games than becoming another center of ridicule.

When he learned there might be a college scholarship in it for him, Chris Marcus finally became interested in basketball.

"He's just a guy who didn't know it," Western Kentucky coach Dennis Felton said. "He didn't really understand how he could get a scholarship to play basketball."

Marcus might have been native, but he was no dummy. If someone was going to hand him that lottery ticket - and the college degree that would come with it - he would give his game a try. His father, James, who worked 40 years as a janitor for Boy Scouts of America, and mother, Louisville, have produced three college graduates among seven children. Chris and his younger brother are expected to become their fourth and fifth.

"I always planned to get my degree, from the day I stepped on this campus," Marcus said. "That was Step One. Never lose sight of what you're here for. My basketball wasn't that serious, until I got here. It was just basketball. You try. You're not good at it, you move onto something else."

Marcus was neither much of a student nor athlete when he first arrived on campus, homesick and painfully shy. Yet, he will likely turn the tassel on his graduation cap and don some NBA team's cap in back-to-back months next spring, completing what might be the season's best college basketball story. He went from C's in high school to B's in college, from second-stringer to consensus pre-season All-American.

Marcus didn't have the grades to be eligible for basketball as a freshman. He had to take remedial courses during his first semester that did not count toward his degree in sociology. In order to graduate on time with his incoming class - and to earn a fourth season of eligibility he probably will not use - he will take 17 or 18 credits in each of his final three semesters.

The signs that Marcus was special were there only for those willing to look closely. Hampton's Steve Merfeld, the only other Division I coach to seriously recruit Marcus, admits that he too was skeptical about this big man who wasn't even a high school starter. A coach with a 7-footer who can't play, after all, is a coach who can't coach. But Merfeld remembers a clue about Marcus' potential from their recruiting visit.

"He drew this pirate head, freehand, that should have been framed," Merfeld recalled. "It was kind of strange. Here was this 7-footer you expected to play, and he had this fine motor skills."
could tell his own and was a non-factor offensively. Dregel flummoxed him into five turnovers—three that led to uncontested dunks—in his 10th contest. Gradually, however, he took the Sun Belt Conference by surprise. If not yet the finesse athlete, Alabama coach Bob Weichsel recalled hearing about this big kid over at Western Kentucky, then being shocked at the man who filled the funnel at Diddle Arena. By January, he was drop-step ping and displaying left- and right-handed baby hooks. Plays now ran through him. He began to handle the double-teams that once baffled him, learning to find the open man from out of them.

"The old saying is that big boys make gigantic strides," New Mexico State Coach Lou Henson said. "That is so true with him. I saw film of him two years ago. He was just OK. He made good progress, but I will continue to do so. As they say, he is the real deal."

Marcus could always rebound. He went after them with both of those big, soft paws, always on balance, never reaching. He averaged 9.5 per game in his first season and led the nation last season with 121 per game.

"He is easily the best rebounder in the country, not just statistically but in reality," Felton said. "He absolutely vacuums rebounds. He gets rebounds in traffic and above the rim. Rebounds that two teams would normally be fighting over, he just ends it."

His offensive game continues to grow.

"The coaches would show me film and say, 'See, Chris, this is what you did last year and what you're doing this year. See how much better that is?'" Marcus said. "All hard work pays off, but it's good when you can actually see it. That was pretty good. That was real good."

Marcus averaged just 16.7 points because that's all the Hilltoppers needed from him. If opponents decided to double-team him and they nearly always did—a core group of eight other players were capable of combining for the remaining 60 points per game that it took Western to compile a 24-7 record. All but one of those players is back, so the Hilltoppers should remain among America's most dangerous mid-majors.

The lessons are still presented nightly for Marcus, 1983-87.

Though a lack of confidence probably kept Marcus from getting an early start in basketball, Felton can remember him being nervous only twice—the first time he suited up for an exhibition and in the Hilltoppers' NCAA Tournament game against Florida last season.

Marcus made 5 of 7 shots in his debut against Southern Illinois, but he didn't have a move that he

gets hung up on his physical dimensions, but clearly his greatest strength is his intelligence. He challenges you as a coach because he wants to know the minute details of what you're trying to teach you. He'll stop you and want to know the points in-between the parts you've given him.”

Assistant coach Pete Herrmann was privileged to also be on the ground floor of another glorious work in progress back when David Robinson was at Navy from 1983-87. The difference was that the more athletic Robinson arrived as a 6-6 forward who grew to be a 7-foot national player of the year and one of the NBA's 50 greatest stars in history. Marcus was big when he arrived. Too big. His 24-percent body fat had to be trimmed to 9 percent. But both had interests beyond the game and skepticism about their futures in it.

"I can still remember David saying how much he disliked practice—he was skinny, and it was very physical,“ Herrmann recalled. "When Chris started, he was afraid to make mistakes. He was not too skilled or happy with his progress. They were very similar in their ability to learn.

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The lessons are still presented nightly for Marcus, who turned 22 on Dec. 11 but has yet to play 100 high school and college games.

When Louisiana Tech chose to guard Marcus straight up, he produced 27 points and 16 rebounds in a 73-72 loss. He felt bad, though, because he took 33 shots, nearly three times his average. The lesson? Herrmann had to convince him that an ignored open shot is as selfish as one that's forced against a double-team.

Felton and Herrmann would still like the mild-mannered Marcus to develop a mean streak. They would like to see him use his width as well as his height and occasionally send some poor sap flying. Then again, they remember his recruiting trip, when he barely said two words, and are amazed at how far he has come.

When Marcus picked up a technical at a critical point of a 68-65 victory over Louisville, Felton was happy.

"I think there was a play where he drop-stepped,
No single player has meant as much to the resurgence of Western Kentucky basketball as Chris Marcus.

In just three short seasons, the 7-foot-1 center went from a player nobody knew anything about, to a force within the Sun Belt Conference, to one of the top players in the country. Despite playing only two and half seasons on the Hill, Marcus leaves as the career leader in blocked shots with 212. He also scored 1,101 points and grabbed 783 rebounds.

Today, Marcus will go through the WKU graduation ceremony along with the two players he came in with - Derek Robinson and Tremain Rowles.

While Rowles and Robinson have both used up their eligibility, Marcus could come back for one more season, because he sat out his first year as an academic nonqualifier.

He's not, though. As he has said all along, Marcus will enter the NBA Draft and not return to Western Kentucky.

"Once I make a decision, I'm going to stick with my word," Marcus said. "I've said I'm going to come out, so I'm coming out."

Marcus is a virtual lock to go in the first round and has a good possibility of becoming a lottery pick.

WKU coach Dennis Felton said he doesn't think Marcus has that much to gain from coming back for another season of college ball.

"I'm a little different from most of these coaches you read about - I've been one of the primary proponents of him going into the NBA. I just think it's the right thing for him," Felton said. "Obviously, it would be better for our team if he stayed another year, but he's going to

See MARCUS, 4B
MARCUS, from 1B

have his degree and I don’t think he has to worry about not being drafted.”

Even if he does get drafted, Marcus could still return for another year of school if he doesn’t sign with an agent.

So far he hasn’t, but he said he plans to once he has graduation out of the way.

“I just wanted to get school out of the way first and then move on,” Marcus said. “I didn’t want to have school lingering and try to deal with all this agent stuff.”

There is a seemingly endless stream of Web sites and publications with mock drafts that have Marcus going to this team with this pick, but he said he’s not spent much time looking at those things.

“People always tell me, so I don’t have to look at it,” he said. “No one will actually know where you’re going to be drafted until you’re picked.”

Marcus has always said he wanted to play in his hometown of Charlotte, N.C., but with Friday’s news that the Hornets were moving to New Orleans, Marcus said he’d like to be drafted by either the Atlanta Hawks or Memphis Grizzlies so he can play relatively close to home.

“I am kinda bitter (about the move),” Marcus said. “They’re my team – they always have been since I started playing basketball. Now that they’re moving, it does hurt.”

Since the college season ended, Marcus has been watching the NBA intently.

“I want the Spurs to win it because Tim Duncan is my favorite player,” he said. “I’d love to see the Spurs and Hornets in the finals.”

And how would Marcus fare against the Spurs superstar?

“He’d probably have me for lunch. He has everybody for lunch,” Marcus said. “He has so many moves you don’t know what to expect and he also rebounds and plays defense.”

It’s hard to tell how big an impact Marcus will make on the NBA landscape, but Felton said he thinks Marcus still has not even come close to reaching his full potential.

“I think he’s going to have a lot to learn. I don’t expect him to make a Tim Duncan kind of splash. He still has a lot to learn, but the biggest reason Chris has become such a good player is because his ability to learn,” Felton said. “I know he is just getting started, and I don’t expect him to slow down.”
Western center makes impression

Sophomore piles on trio of Sun Belt honors in SBC's

By BILL GAMBLIN JR.

The Daily News
bgamblin@bgdailynews.com/783-3238

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. - Western Kentucky sophomore Chris Marcus
earned a trio of Sun Belt Conference honors.

Marcus, a 7-1 center out of Olympic High School in Charlotte,
N.C., was named the All-Sun Belt Conference Team announced Friday.

He was also honored as the league's Defensive Player of the Year
and Newcomer of the Year.

After sitting out the 1998-99 season as a redshirt, Marcus has used an
impressing department and he is also leading the conference with a field goal
percentage of 60.3 percent. He is also averaging 11.7 points
per outing.

Marcus was named the Sun Belt Player of the Week on Jan. 31 after
recording three double-doubles for the Hilltoppers that week.

Entering the Sun Belt tourney, Marcus is just one blocked shot shy
of Western's school record set by Clarence Martin in 1987.

Marcus currently leads the Hilltoppers in double-figure games both
scoring (19) and rebounding (12), while being credited with nine of
Western's 11 double-doubles so far this season. He has also been
the game's top rebounder in 15 of the Hilltoppers 27 games, while leading
Western on the boards 22 occasions.

Louisiana Tech's Geron Henderson,
who was the only unanimous selection, was named the Sun Belt Player of the Year while Tech's
Antonio Meeking was honored as the league's Freshman of the Year.

South Alabama's Bob Weltlich
was named the league's Coach of the Year.

SBC history on side of top seeds

NORTH LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (AP) — History will be on the side of South Alabama and Louisiana-
Lafayette when the Sun Belt Conference tournament begins tonight.

South Alabama and Louisiana-
Lafayette shared the regular-season title and the Jaguars are the No. 1 seed because they swept Louisiana-
Lafayette during the regular season. The Ragin' Cajuns are the No. 2 seed and no team seeded lower than second
doesn't have the Sun Belt tournament since the conference merged with the American South Conference in 1991.

The winner gets an automatic berth in the NCAA Tournament.

South Alabama (18-9, 13-3) plays No. 9 Arkansas-Little Rock (4-23, 1-15) in the second game on Saturday.

In the first game, Denver (5-21, 3-13) plays New Orleans (10-17, 6-10).

Louisiana-Lafayette (22-8, 13-3)
meets the Denver-New Orleans winner in the second game on Sunday. In the first game of the day, Arkansas
State (10-17, 7-9) plays Louisiana
Tech (20-7, 12-4). Florida International (16-13, 9-7) meets Western
Kentucky (10-17, 8-8) Sunday night.

The semifinals are Monday night and the finals are Tuesday night.

Picked for seventh in the preseason, South Alabama was the Sun Belt surprise team of the year.

"We didn't have a preseason all-
conference selection," said Jaguar coach Bob Weltlich. "I think our guys have taken it on themselves to
show people that we're a better basketball team than we were perceived to be.

"As a result, we've continued to
get better and all of a sudden, we've
won a championship and a top seed," he said. "I don't think this is a
group that is going to look past a first
game."

"We still have a chance," said UALR coach Sidney Moncrief. "We
played five consecutive games at a
pretty high level. We only won one
out of the five, but we could've won
any of them."

He admitted the Trojans played
poorly last Saturday at Western
Kentucky.

Last season, Arkansas State won
the Sun Belt tournament and lost to
Utah in the first round of the NCAA.
Western center is finding himself in upscale company

By ANDY DENNIS
The Daily News

There once was an unknown Mr. Robinson in this man's neighborhood.

His name, David Robinson, a struggling freshman at Navy in 1983. The man's name, Pete Herrmann, then the Navy head coach and now a Western Kentucky assistant coach.

"He only averaged two points a game when he was a freshman," Herrmann said.

Now, there's another relative unknown in Herrmann's camp. He hasn't earned enough national respect to be called Mr. Marcus, but Western's 7-foot-1 center Chris Marcus, Herrmann said, is making his way toward Mr. Robinson's neighborhood, the NBA.

Not that the two centers are similar in terms of their games or talent - Robinson is more of a finesse player - but one of the top 50 players ever - while Marcus is a college center whose game is based on power, Herrmann said. But their stories are similar in terms of development.

"My whole belief with Chris is that he can continue to get better," Herrmann said. "I think he's got a good chance to continue his rapid development. His success has come faster than he anticipated."

Marcus, who is playing in his second season of organized basketball - his first was his senior season at Olympic High School in Charlotte, N.C. - is the Sun Belt Conference regular season rebounding champ. He averaged 9.4 rebounds, 11.7 points and blocked 68 shots, one shy of the Western single season record. He led the league in double-doubles (double figures in points and rebounds in a game) with nine.

Not staggering numbers. But maybe a bit more meaningful judging from his improvement from the beginning of the season until now as the Hilltoppers prepare to take on Florida International University at 7 p.m. Sunday in the conference tournament in Little Rock, Ark.

By the numbers
Chris Marcus

Height: 7-foot-1
Weight: 280 pounds
Scoring: 11.7 ppg
Rebounding: 9.4 ppg
Class: Sophomore
High game, scoring: 20 points
High game, rebounding: 17
High game, shot blocks: 6
Quote: "Chris is not only a big man, he's a big guy with very good hands, a very good natural touch, and has so far shown a quickness to learning the game and picking up things." - Western Kentucky University coach Dennis Felton.

"Our first intersquad game, Chris was just out there," Western head coach Dennis Felton said. "He was not really effective at all. Now he's turned into one of the biggest forces in the league.

"When people get ready to play us, they're more concerned about dealing with Chris than anybody on the team."

Herrmann's role in Marcus' development includes serving as a liaison between Marcus and Robinson, who at Herrmann's behest talked with Marcus about how to be a better center.

"It was early in the season and I wanted Chris to ask David about blocking shots, positioning for rebounds, Chris' ability to stay on the floor, block shots and not foul, a lot of technical things a player of David's status can relate to Chris," Herrmann said.

Herrmann has a unique experience working with two of the best big men to ever play. He coached Robinson four years at Navy and worked with Shaquille O'Neal during the U.S. Olympic Festival in 1990.

He said Marcus is progressing faster than most men his size.

Seven-foot-one center Chris Marcus juggles a rebound during a game between Western Kentucky University's Hilltoppers and Arkansas-Little Rock.

"My feeling is bigger players come along slower because they're maturing into their bodies," Herrmann said. "He's been very receptive to coaching and just a pleasure to be around and coach.

"His development has come in leaps and bounds."

Marcus said he doesn't plan to try to jump to the NBA early, like several underclassmen have done - many unsuccessfully - in the past few years.

"When I first came here I weighed 320. Now I'm down to 280," he said. "I've got a lot of work to do. I'm getting in shape, getting stronger.

I've got a lot to learn."

Felton said Marcus' learning curve should continue upward.

"Because he's such an intelligent guy, he has shown a tendency to improve quickly," Felton said. "It's easy to get excited about his prospects for the future."

"He's also just getting started in terms of conditioning his body as an athlete."

"He's still got a lot of offensive skill work and foot work he can develop to make him much tougher. As he develops, his confidence develops. His confidence has really soared from the guy he was when he walked in here."
Western Kentucky University center Chris Marcus powers past Murray State's Andi Homing for a dunk in their Dec. 6 game.

"There was a little bit of talk about that last year, but I didn't really pay any attention to it," he said. "Now that I'm a junior and I guess I'm doing pretty good, people are starting to talk about it even more."

"It's kinda hard to block it out and not think about it with so many questions, but the best thing is that I've got my teammates seeing me; they have to focus on what I need to do right now, leaving early is one of the hardest things he's had to do. In fact, he's hoping to get to stay around for a little while.

"I'm working on getting that extra year back," Marcus said. "I'm taking 18 credits this semester so that I can maybe get that back. If I could have this year, next year and the year after that - that would be really good."

Marcus said he realized he has a lot to learn when it comes to basketball and does not want to make the jump to the pros before he's ready.

"I watch the NBA and I watch some of these guys that make the decision to go early and they just fall off, and you never hear about them again," he said. "So many guys make that mistake and think they're ready and they're not - they still have a ton to learn on the college level."

"There's a lot of doubt that Marcus has the tools to be a successful NBA prospect. "If he keeps working hard like he does, and gets a few more years under his belt, there's no doubt in my mind that he could play in the league," Boyden said.
Marcus playing his way through college

By Chris Glowacki
WKU Sports Information

It didn't take long for Chris Marcus to establish himself as a favorite among Hilltopper basketball fans and as a nemesis for opposing coaches.

Marcus, the 1999-2000 All-Sun Belt and All-SBC Tournament selection, has accomplished as much in a year and a half of college basketball as many do in their whole careers. The Charlotte, N.C. native has already outdone almost everyone's expectations despite the fact that he is still developing as a player.

But the 7’1”, 285 pounder's athletic experience did not begin on the hardwood. Instead, it began on the gridiron as both a quarterback and tight end for Kennedy Middle School in Charlotte as a ninth grader.

"A lot of my friends were playing football and at that age you want to stick with your friends, so I played football," Marcus said. "It was fun being with the kids from my neighborhood, but I was about 6’4” at the time and was always getting hit low, so I gave up football after that year.

When he entered Olympic High School as a sophomore, Marcus had no visions of playing organized sports again. Despite growing to 6’7” as a sophomore and 6’10” as a junior, he was content just going to school and even worked a part-time job at Wal-Mart on the weekends.

"I was always the tallest kid in high school, but I just wasn’t into basketball, even though the coaches were always trying to get me to come out," he said.

Marcus had no serious plans for life after high school, but early in his senior year a conversation with Olympic High coach Dave Davis changed that.

"Coach Davis encouraged me to give basketball one last shot. He told me that with my size I had a good chance to play college ball and get a free education," Marcus said. "That's when it really hit me - a free education! And, my parents sure liked the idea of a free education."

With the encouragement of his mother, Louisville, Chris tried out and made the team. Although his talent was raw and playing time was limited early on, colleges began to take notice, mostly because of his 6’11” frame. He was introduced to Felton, then associate head coach at Clemson, who reiterated the positives basketball could provide for him in helping him get an education.

"Coach Felton saw me play a couple times," Marcus said. "He even called me later in the season and talked about school and my development as a player. He didn't even talk about recruiting me then. But it was a good conversation, and afterward I knew I had made the right decision to play."

Later that spring, Felton took the head coaching job at Western Kentucky.

"I was really impressed with Western, mostly because Coach Felton was one of the first coaches I had met. Also, he talked more about my education and development as a person. The older guys, especially Raven (Farris) and Mel (Adams) made me feel at home the whole time I was here visiting."

After sitting out his first year at WKU concentrating on his classwork, he emerged immediately as a star in the Sun Belt, leading the SBC in rebounds and blocked shots in his first season (1999-00) while earning the league's Newcomer-of-the-Year and Defensive Player-of-the-Year awards.

Along the way, he set a new Western record with 76 blocked shots in his first year.

Now two-thirds of the way through the 2000-01 season, Marcus has recorded 12 double-doubles, the third highest total for a Division I athlete to date this year including the last seven games in a row, while leading the Hilltoppers with his 16.3. He is also averaging 12.2 rebounds per game, including a 21-rebound effort in the Toppers, home win over Tennessee State on Nov. 25. And he recorded a career-high nine blocks that same afternoon.

Marcus is also the only Hilltopper on record to block 100 or more shots in less than two full seasons of play. His 136 career rejections already rank him second among all Hilltoppers, trailing only former Topper great Clarence Martin (198 in his four-year career).

Marcus is also gaining national attention as he ranked third in the nation in rebounding and ninth in blocked shots through games of Jan. 22.

Although the idea of playing professional basketball remains a possibility, Marcus' priority is pursuing a degree in sociology.

"I'd hate to think about playing pro ball," Marcus admits. "But once I get my degree, then I'll think about that. Right now getting that degree is my top priority."
Hilltopper On Top
Marcus soars on and over the court
Hilltopper On Top

WKU's Chris Marcus soars on and off the court

Chris Marcus' favorite shot is the slam dunk. "It gives fans something to feed off of. It's exciting and gives everyone on the team a boost."

Like most students at Western Kentucky University, Chris Marcus is intent on getting a good education. He doesn't socialize much and has never been to a party. Studies come first for him. The main difference between Marcus and other serious minded students on the Hill...Marcus stands 7'1" tall and is one of the leading basketball players in the country.

The Dallas Morning News, and Sports Illustrated are among the recent inquirers wanting to learn more about Marcus. Paul Just, Director of Sports Information at Western, believes Marcus is one of the best stories in college basketball. People have begun to take notice.

Chris Marcus is second in the nation in rebounding, third in double doubles, and 10th in blocked shots. He is the dominant center on a WKU basketball team that is imposing their will on opposing teams. They are 17-5 overall and 10-1 in the Sun Belt Conference. On offense, they recently scored 107 points against conference foe, North Texas, and they are 12th in the nation in scoring defense.

Chris Marcus embodies the best of what a student athlete can be. He makes it clear that he would like to play in the NBA, but only after he gets his education. "After I get my degree, and if the opportunity presents itself, I do want to play in the NBA. I want to pursue it. It's an individual goal that I want to obtain...to be able to play at that level and to be considered one of the best in the country."

Marcus knows he can be successful in ways other than basketball. In fact, the only reason he is playing organized basketball is because it was the best way to get a good education.

Marcus was not that interested in basketball growing up. "My mom watched more basketball than I did," he said. Despite standing 6'11" in high school, he did not play high school basketball until his senior year. His plans had been to get a job after graduating, maybe go to a community college. High School basketball coach, Dave Davis convinced Marcus there may be a college scholarship to a good university available if he played.

WKU Head Coach Dennis Felton was interested in two of Marcus' teammates at Olympic High School in Charlotte, North Carolina, when he was first impressed by Chris Marcus. Felton was a coach for Clemson at the time. Marcus liked him because on his recruiting calls he always spoke about education.

When Felton became Head Coach at WKU he offered Chris a scholarship, as did several other schools. Marcus had narrowed his choice of schools to two when he came to Western for a visit. "At that time I met Mel Adams and Ravon Farris, they were the main two guys then, and I just hung with the guys and bonded with the team - the players and the coach," he said. The choice was easy after that.

Coach Felton is now a steady influence in his life. He praises Marcus' accomplishments, but cautions him at the same time. "When he plays well, Felton says so, then points out how he could have been better. According to Coach Felton, "When you consider that he has played barely 70 games in his life, his rate of development can only be described as remarkable. Everyone notices his physical dimensions, but what everyone in our program knows is that his intelligence is the primary reason for his rapid improvement."

Because of his size Marcus encountered a lot of high expectations when he came to Western. He credits the Coach with helping him take one step at a time and teaching him the skills that have enabled him to improve. Felton described Marcus' personality as "extremely intelligent, thoughtful and analytical. He doesn't spend a lot of time talking. He'd rather listen and learn."

"While at Western, he has really developed an inquisitiveness about everything," said Felton. "As a result, he is a far more serious student than the guy who arrived two and a half years ago." Marcus is now meeting those high expectations.
James and Louisville Marcus moved their family of seven children from Chicago to Charlotte, North Carolina, before Chris started third grade. They wanted a better environment in which to raise their family. Chris gives his parents much credit in raising him and his siblings. He credits his parents for instilling in him values such as stand up for what you believe in, if you're going to do something — go at it hard, and be true to yourself.

Marcus said his parents are very supportive of his decisions but have never pressured him to play basketball. Today they are very proud that he "look to my parents — that is where I get my strength, that is where I get my energy."

~Chris Marcus

is doing well, and like Coach Felton, they temper their excitement with advice, that keeps him learning and keeps his feet on the ground.

Marcus believes he is blessed by God in his unique size and talents. He is focused on earning an education and improving his game. The accomplishments he is most proud of are being away from home attending college, getting a good education, and not needing his parents for every single thing. Marcus says "It's been a lot of hard work," to be included among the country's leading college basketball players.

"I believe Chris will be an extremely dominating force before he is finished at Western," said Felton. "Where he will top out, even I don't know."

~Story by Jason Hines

Photo by Joe Glowacki

Cover photo by Jim Winn

Paint a Plate for your Date

You've done flowers, candy, movies and restaurants. This year Do it right by choosing from over 150 items you can paint. So make your date a Valentine gift that will last forever.

Free — studio time for all couples
10% off all Valentine's Day Gifts,
Heart boxes and Bud vases
offer good thru
2-14-01

Playful Potter Makes a Great Date.
7-1 Marcus growing in new ways

Western Kentucky center maturing into strong player, stronger person

By Don Collins
USA TODAY

As Chris Marcus’ basketball ability has increased, his parents’ phone bills have decreased.

Marcus is a 7-1, 287-pound junior center for Western Kentucky. He is second in the NCAA in rebounding at 11.6 a game and 11th in blocked shots at 3.2 a game. He likes college so much that he’s thinking of putting off the NBA.

That’s a big difference from his freshman season, when he sat out for academic reasons, was homesick for his family in Charlotte, and called home — almost every day. “I’m real close to my family,” Marcus says.

His mom, Louisville, says she understands but eventually put a time limit on the calls. “It was his first time away from his family,” she says. “I’m thankful he moved through it.”

Opposing teams probably wish Marcus, who was the Sun Belt Conference newcomer and defensive player of the year last season, would move on to the NBA. But he’s in no hurry.

“When I get my degree, if the opportunity is there, then we’ll see,” he says.

Marcus’ observations on the NBA don’t sway Western coach Dennis Felton, in his third season after being an assistant at Clemson. Because Marcus didn’t play until his senior year of high school, “Chris is now part of the basketball machine,” he says. “Too many adults have dollar signs in their eyes and try to poison kids. Chris didn’t go through that. His family is very supportive — sports aren’t as important to them.”

Felton, while acknowledging Marcus can improve in areas such as being more aggressive and developing more offensive moves, points out that his junior center has played about 80 games of competitive basketball between high school and college.

“Are more important than the 7-foot,” Felton says, “the reason Chris has developed so quickly is his ability to learn. He’s very analytical and thoughtful.”

Says Nutt: “He’s had improvements incredibly the last two years. A year ago, we didn’t think he could score. If you double-teamed him, he’d kick it out. Now, he can really score.”

Says Nashon McPherson, Western’s only senior and one of Marcus’ closest friends on the team: “Chris is very grounded. He’s like a sponge. He absorbs everything.

“He has the total package. The only thing that would make him more special is if he brought the ball up the court, but we don’t need him to do that.”

“I could definitely see him playing in the NBA,” Nutt says. “If he keeps improving at the same rate he’s at now, I think he’s like a 4-5 years from now.”

Of course, on an NBA salary, he could afford the phone calls home.

Notre Dame locks in title with 82-63 win

From wire reports

Kelley Stinson had 17 points and eight rebounds Tuesday night as visiting No. 2 Notre Dame clinched a share of the Big East regular-season title with an 82-63 victory at Pittsburgh.

ended the season on a seven-game losing streak.

Connecticut 83, Seton Hall 48

The visiting No. 3 Huskies (25-2, 15-1 Big East) shot 52% from the field and forced 25 turnovers to close their regular season with a win over the Pirates (19-16, 11-7 Big East) started the second half with a 21-6 burst to expand a 30-29 halftime lead vs. the Hoyas (15-13, 6-10). Rebecca Brunson had 26 points and 12 rebounds for Georgetown.

Villanova 60, Miami (Fla.) 59

The visiting 23rd-ranked Wildcats (20-5, 13-3 Big East) forced 25 turnovers to close their regular season with a win over the Hurricanes (15-14, 6-10) bound from Janet Holt, the league’s player of the year for the second season in a row, en route to a first-round win against Tennessee State (6-10). The Eagles face the winner of Tuesday’s game between Tennessee-Martin and Southeast Missouri State on Friday night, as visiting No. 20 South Carolina (The Vols (20-9, 7-8 Conference) erased a deficit in the final minute and Terrence Ross three-pointer a sent the game into an overtime, led by 57-56. South Carolina...
Marcus named SBC Player of the Year

UNO’s Stiebing gets Coach of the Year

By the Daily News  FEB 26 2001

Western Kentucky University basketball player Chris Marcus on Wednesday was named the Sun Belt Conference’s Player of the Year and Defensive Player of the Year.

Marcus, a 7-foot-1 junior center, led his team to the East Division championship and a 21-6 regular season record. He leads the league in rebounding (11.6 rpg) — both offensive (3.9 rpg) and defensive (7.7 rpg) — is second in blocked shots (3.2 bpg), fourth in field goal percentage (54.0 percent) and eighth in scoring (15.9 ppg).

Both Western coach Dennis Felton and Arkansas-Little Rock coach Porter Moser were passed over for Coach of the Year honors in favor of New Orleans’ Joey Stiebing.

Stiebing led the Privateers to a 16-11 regular season record and a chance at the West Division championship.

Nick Rivers of Arkansas State picked up Newcomer of the Year honors, while New Mexico State’s James Moore received the Freshman of the Year award. Rivers, a junior guard for the Indians, is 14th in the league in scoring (13.7 ppg) and 11th in three-point shooting (1.8 per game).

The formal presentation of the SBC’s annual honors will be Friday prior to the 6:30 pm. men’s basketball game between Florida International and Denver at the league tournament in Mobile, Ala. The awards were voted on by the league’s head coaches, sports information directors and selected media.

Moore, a forward for the Aggies, is 22nd in the league in scoring (11.7 ppg) and the only freshman in the top 25, 15th in rebounding (5.9 rpg) and steals (1.3 spg), sixth in free throw shooting (76.5 percent) and third in blocked shots (1.9 bpg).

There were just two unanimous selections to the 10-member all-Sun Belt Conference Team – Marcus and Arkansas-Little Rock senior forward Stan Blackmon. Blackmon is second in the league in scoring with 18.7 ppg, 10th in rebounding (7.0 rpg), tops in field goal shooting (55.4 percent), 11th in free throw shooting (72.4 percent) and blocked shots (0.8 bpg), and eighth in steals (1.4 pg).
Western Kentucky center named AP All-American

Blue Devil duo named to first team

By The Associated Press and The Daily News

Western Kentucky University center Chris Marcus was an honorable mention selection on the Associated Press All-America team announced Tuesday.

The 7-foot-1 center averaged 16.8 points and 11.9 rebounds a game. He was one of 46 players to get an honorable mention. He also was voted Player of the Year and Defensive Player of the Year in the Sun Belt Conference and was Most Valuable Player in the SBC Tournament.

Each member of the first team earned a piece of history with his selection.

Duke's Shane Battier and Jason Williams were the top vote-getters when the team was announced Tuesday, becoming the eighth set of teammates chosen for the first team.

North Carolina's Joseph Forte was next in the voting. Forte and the two Blue Devils became just the second threesome from one conference to make the first team.

Notre Dame's Troy Murphy was the 54th player to repeat as an All-American, while Casey Jacobsen was Stanford's first first-team selection.

Battier, the only senior on the All-America team, was one vote shy of being a unanimous selection by the national media panel. The 6-foot-8 forward was on 70 first-team ballots and had 353 points in the 5-3-1 voting system.

The national defensive player for the past two seasons, Battier averaged 19.5 points and 6.8 rebounds in leading Duke, which was No. 1 in the final regular-season poll for the third straight season, joining UCLA from 1971-73 as the only teams to do that.

Battier, a second-team All-America last season, and Williams, a 6-2 sophomore who averaged 20.8 points, 6.2 assists and 1.9 steals, are the first teammates selected for the first team since 1997-98. Both Raef LaFrentz and Paul Pierce of Kansas and Mike Bibby and Miles Simon of Arizona did it that season.

"As nice as it is to get the attention individually, it makes it even better that I can share All-America status with one of my teammates," Battier said. "Hopefully, we can both continue to perform well as we enter the NCAA tournament."

Forte, a 6-4 sophomore, was chosen co-player of the year in the Atlantic Coast Conference with Battier. He averaged 21.6 points, 6.0 rebounds, 3.6 assists and 2.0 steals for the Tar Heels, who finished tied for the ACC regular-season title with Duke. North Carolina lost to the Blue Devils in the tournament championship game.
The Nittany Lions shot 44 percent overall and were 8 of 19 (42.1 percent) from three-point range against a team that held opponents to 29 percent from long range this season. The Friars shot 36 percent.

SOUTH REGIONAL NOTEBOOK

Donovan impressed by WKU’s Marcus

By C.L. BROWN
The Courier-Journal

NEW ORLEANS — Just how impressed was University of Florida coach Billy Donovan with Western Kentucky University center Chris Marcus?

In the postgame news conference he flipped the question back to media types who cover the Southeastern Conference.

"Tell me one post player better than Chris Marcus," he said. "He's not there."

This after Marcus posted his 20th double-double this season with 20 points and 16 rebounds in the Hilltoppers' 69-56 loss yesterday.

Donovan said the 7-foot-1 junior is "as good as any center I've seen in America."

Censor needed

Donovan was clearly upset with the Gators while watching Western jump out to a 12-8 lead. He called a timeout to cool off the Hilltoppers and lit into his team. When Udonis Haslem was asked what Donovan told them, he said: "Beep-beep, beep-beep. Nah, he just told us to maintain our focus."

Rebounding factor

Western entered the game with the third-best rebounding margin in the nation. The Hilltoppers were outrebounding their opponents by an average of 9.6 per game, trailing only Michigan State and Georgetown.

But Florida kept the Hilltoppers off the glass, outrebounding them 40-33.

WKU coach Dennis Felton said one of the most telling stats was the eight team rebounds the Gators got.

"There are times when we had it and just didn't secure it," he said. "We didn't play with that physical toughness."

The Hilltoppers were last outrebounded against St. Joseph's when they were beaten 33-28 on the boards en route to a 74-68 loss on Dec. 21.

Tourney inspiration

Thursday's first round included No. 9 seed St. Joseph's over No. 8 Georgia Tech; No. 10 Georgetown over No. 7 Arkansas; No. 11 Georgia State over No. 6 Wisconsin; No. 12 Utah State over No. 5 Ohio State; No. 13 Kent State over No. 4 Indiana; and No. 15 Hampton over No. 2 Iowa State.

Western players watched some of those games, and guard Raynardo Curry figured the odds favored a No. 14 seed completing the list of upsets.

"It gave us a lot of confidence," he said. "I was thinking next Florida is going to get upset."

Tidbits

- Florida had just two players in double figures for only the second time this season. The last time that happened came in a 65-63 victory over Auburn.
- The Hilltoppers shot 33 percent, making their record 3-4 in games they shot less than 40 percent.
- WKU senior guard Nashon McPherson closed his career with 993 points and is second all-time in school history with 151 three-pointers.
Topper center named to All-District 4 team

Western Kentucky University junior Chris Marcus has been honored with a berth on the United States Basketball Writers Association (USBWA) All-District 4 Team.

Marcus, who averaged 16.7 points and 12.1 rebounds in leading the resurgent Hilltoppers to a 24-7 record, a Sun Belt Conference regular season title, the SBC tourney crown and a berth in the NCAA Tournament, was one of 10 athletes honored from each of the USBWA's nine districts nationwide.

Earlier, the 7-foot-1, 285-pound center was named to the Associated Press All-America Team (honorable mention) and the National Association of Basketball Coaches (NABC) All-District 7 Team.

Other athletes recognized on the USBWA's 4th District Team were Tayshaun Prince, Kentucky; Vincent Yarbrough, Tennessee; Trenton Hassell, Austin Peay; Rod Grizzard, Alabama; Udonis Haslem, Florida; Brett Nelson, Florida; Rahim Lockhart, Mississippi; D.A. Layne, Georgia; and Altron Jackson, South Florida.

Marcus was one of just two Sun Belt Conference athletes honored by the USBWA. Arkansas-Little Rock's Stan Blackmon was a member of the All-District 7 Team.

Marcus gets another award

Although the men's basketball team's season has been finished for weeks now, junior center Chris Marcus is still racking up awards.

His most recent came Tuesday with a place on the United States Basketball Writers Association All District 4 team. Marcus averaged 16.7 points a game this year to go with 12 rebounds.

The 7-foot-1 center was also named an All-American Honorable Mention and was named to the National Association of Basketball Coaches All-District 7 team. He was also Player of the Year in the Sun Belt Conference, Most Outstanding Player in the conference tournament, the Sun Belt Defensive Player of the Year and was named to the All-Conference team.

—Travis Williams
Marcus, Mansfield named top athletes

Toppers center is 7th basketball player to receive the award

By the Daily News

Basketball standouts Chris Marcus and ShaRae Mansfield have been named Western Kentucky University Male and Female Athletes of the Year.

Marcus is the seventh Hilltopper basketball player to receive the award, and the first since Darrin Horn in 1995.

The Charlotte, N.C., native was a dominant force in Western's 24-7 season, guiding the Hilltoppers to an NCAA Tournament appearance. He led the nation in rebounding (12.1 rpg) to become the first Hilltopper in 42 years to win an NCAA statistical category. He also ranked among the league leaders in blocked shots (3.1 bpg, 11th) and double-doubles (20, third), and is only the second Western player in the last 30 years to average a double-double for an entire season.

Mansfield is only the second female athlete to win the award twice. The Louisville native also won the prize as a junior last year.

She became only the second player in school history and the sixth SBC athlete to amass 1,000 points and 1,000 rebounds in her career. Mansfield is the school's second all-time leading scorer (1,804 points) and rebounder (1,000).

Mansfield was named to the all-Sun Belt team for the third consecutive season in 2001.

She leaves Western as only the second Lady Topper to rank in the top 10 in 13 different statistical categories. Lillie Mason (Stockton) is the only other player to lay claim to that feat.

On Friday, she was selected 33rd overall by the Houston Comets in the Women's National Basketball Association draft.
WKU star's focus on graduation, not draft

BOWLING GREEN, Ky. — Chris Marcus could be out there with his basketball peers. He could be giddily spending an agent's money on an Escalade. He could be immersed in the intellectual rigors of Nintendo one minute, then trying to act mature for the pro scouts the next. He could be preparing for the David Stern handshake at month's end that would change his life.

He's not. The Western Kentucky University center is right where he wants to be.

The fourth-year junior-to-be is taking a bear of a statistics course this summer, trying to keep himself on track to graduate with a Sociology degree next May. If he doesn't get the diploma then, coming back for a fifth year is a possibility.

"I LIKE college," Marcus said, blaspheming modern basketball in three words. "I'm not quite ready to go yet."

Are you kidding? The scouts are absolutely sure the 7-foot-1, 230-pound colossus who led the nation in rebounding is ready for their league — especially in comparison to some of the laughably unprepared kids who have declared for the National Basketball Association draft. (Are your ears burning, Keith Bogans?)

"I think he definitely would have been a lottery pick," said Chris Monter, who publishes the respected Monter Draft News.

Sometimes it seems as if the shy, polite Marcus is the only guy who didn't come out. He never considered it, not even after averaging 16.7 points and 12.1 rebounds and leading the Hilltoppers to a 24-7 record and an NCAA Tournament bid.

He is blessed with two precious commodities: patience and perspective.
High praise

Hilltopper center Chris Marcus continued to get his name in the national media this week when ESPN.com's college basketball writer Andy Katz devoted his "Daily Word" column to Marcus.

"He's the best college big-man in the country," Katz said in a phone interview.

Katz speculated that if Marcus graduates on time, and comes back for a fourth year of college basketball, he could be the top pick in the 2003 NBA Draft.

Thanks in large part to Marcus, Katz also said he thinks the Hilltoppers have a great chance to make some noise in the NCAA Tournament this season.

"They've got a great shot to be one of those mid-major's that sneaks up and wins a game or two in the tournament," Katz said.

While Katz wouldn't guess at what kind of a seed WKU could potentially receive in the tourney, he did say it would be tough for a mid-major to get anything higher than a nine seed.

"Schools like that are going to have to win a lot of games early and hope to stay in the poll," Katz said.

— OJ Stapleton is the sports editor of the Daily News. His column runs weekly.
Marcus will benefit with extra year

If everything goes as planned, Chris Marcus will enter next year's NBA Draft as a top-five pick.

And compared with the contingent of high school big men bypassing college for the pros, Marcus will be a grizzled veteran by the time he makes the leap.

The Western Kentucky University 7-foot-1 senior-to-be said in Saturday's Daily News that he'd love for this to be his last year as a Hilltopper.

"I plan on making the jump. I want people to know that," Marcus said.

Playing in the NBA will indeed be a jump for Marcus. But not as big of one as it will be for Washington's draft pick and first overall selection Kwame Brown.

Sure, Brown may develop into the league's next superstar. Others like Minnesota's Kevin Garnett and L.A.'s Kobe Bryant have made the jump from high school to the pros, and now they're two of the league's biggest superstars.

Moses Malone did it and now he's considered one of the best centers off all time.

But school boys skipping college for a chance at gazillion-dollar signing bonus and guaranteed shoe contracts has become the norm.

Even a talented college player who makes it past his sophomore season before declaring for the draft is an oddity.

To see someone like Marcus, who's decided he wants to finish school first and play later, is refreshing.

Marcus could've gone pro at the end of last season and been an instant millionaire. No one would've blamed him. Heck, if I was Marcus, I would've probably left after my freshman year to play for the CBA league-minimum.

By staying, Marcus has another year to prove to the pro scouts that he's the best college big man, if he hasn't proved it already.

Marcus led the nation in rebounding last season (12 rpg) and was the 'Topper's' leading scorer (16 ppg).

If Marcus repeats his performance from last year, his stock will rise.

Instead of being a mid-to-late first-round pick in this past year's draft, Marcus, if he stays healthy, will no doubt be a top-five selection next year.

Think about it. Who in the league aside from Philadelphia, San Antonio, Sacramento, and of course, the Lakers, has a quality big man? Marcus could come in and start for half of the league's squads already.

I'm not saying he's going to set the league on fire. There's still a few guys named Shaq, Dikembe and Tim that have done alright. But Chris might be a household name before long.

While the league's diaper dandies, Brown, Chicago's Eddy Curry and Tyson Chandler all may light up the league four or five years down the road, the "grizzled veteran" Marcus could be an immediate impact player in his first two seasons because he'll have another year of the college game under his belt.

Marcus, in a lot of ways, reminds me of Tennessee Titans' defensive end Jevon Kearse. Kearse was a linebacker at Florida and didn't even know what he was doing two years ago at his position when he led the league in sacks to lead the Titans to the Super Bowl.

Marcus, too, is still learning his position. He didn't play organized ball until his senior year in high school.

Just like the talented Kearse, the sky's the limit for Marcus.

— Matt Pabreza's column runs every other Monday in the Daily News.
Marcus honored by publication
WKU center lands on All-America team

By the Daily News
Western Kentucky University senior center Chris Marcus has added another honor to his list of preseason laurels this summer, getting the nod as the center on Lindy's College Basketball Annual's All-America Team.

The complete five-man Lindy's honor squad will be announced when its college basketball preview comes out Sept. 25.

Lindy's is the second preseason All-America selection to date this summer for Marcus, who was selected on Playboy's 10-man preseason squad in late June.

Marcus — an Associated Press All-American following the conclusion of the 2000-01 season and already being touted as perhaps the top big man in the college game in the upcoming year — led the nation in rebounding (12.1 rpg) and the Hilltoppers in scoring with his 16.7 ppg average. He helped the Hilltoppers to a 24-7 mark, Sun Belt Conference Tournament and regular-season titles and a berth in the NCAA Tournament last season.

For his efforts, Marcus was named the SBC Player of the Year, the MVP of the league tournament, and, for the second season in a row, the SBC Defensive Player of the Year. He also ranked among the nation's leaders in double-doubles and blocked shots.

A product of Olympic High School in Charlotte, N.C., he is one of four starters and 12 letter winners returning to the Hilltoppers, who have recently been recognized by FOXSports.com as one of the top 35 teams in the nation.
Chris Marcus continues to rack up the preseason awards. The Western Kentucky University senior center was named to The John R. Wooden Award Preseason All-American Team. Marcus was selected in a national poll of The John R. Wooden Award Preseason Committee to determine the Top 50 preseason candidates for the 2001-02 Wooden Award All-American Team. The Top 50 candidates were selected based on last year's individual performances and team records. Marcus is the first Hilltopper ever to be honored on The Wooden Award Preseason All-American Team. The 50 will be pared down to 10 finalists March 26 and the Wooden Award Trophy will go to one of them April 7. The Wooden Award Trophy goes to the nation's "Most Outstanding Collegiate Basketball Player of the Year." Other candidates include Jason Williams, Chris Duhon and Mike Dunleavy of Duke, Kentucky's Keith Bogans and Tayshaun Prince and Tennessee's Vincent Yarbrough. Marcus -- an Associated Press All-American following the conclusion of the 2000-01 campaign -- led the nation in rebounding (12.1 rpg) and the Hilltoppers in scoring with his 16.7 ppg average, pacing Western to a 24-7 mark, Sun Belt Conference Tournament and regular season titles.
Marcus up for player of year

WKU center is one of 30 candidates for the James Naismith Award

By the Daily News

The preseason honors keep rolling in for Western Kentucky's Chris Marcus.

On Tuesday, the Hilltoppers' 7-foot-1 senior center was named as a candidate for college basketball player of the year and to another preseason All-American team.

Atlanta Tipoff Club President Jackie Bradford announced Marcus as one of 30 preseason candidates for the James Naismith Award. Other candidates include Duke guard Jason Williams, Florida center Udonis Haslem and Kentucky's Tayshaun Prince and Keith Bogans.

"The thing that makes us most proud about Chris is because he is getting this recognition based solely on his performance," said WKU coach Dennis Felton. "He didn't come in with the kind of credentials where anybody was keeping an eye on him and expecting him to become an All-American and there's been no propaganda machine working. Everything he has received is because of what he has accomplished."

The candidates were chosen by a vote of the board of selectors comprised of basketball coaches, journalists and analysts. Williams, who set a single-season scoring record for the Blue Devils, was the leading vote-getter. Jacobsen was second and Illinois' Frank Williams was third.

Marcus, who averaged a little more than 16 points and 12 rebounds per game last season, also was named to the 2001-02 Blue Ribbon All-American team on Tuesday. Marcus -- the only true post player named to the first team -- beat other the nation's other premier big men, including Haslem, Duke's Carlos Boozer, and UCLA's Dan Gadzuric.

Other first-teamers include Florida's Brett Nelson and Stanford's Casey Jacobsen, as well as Williams and Prince.

Blue Ribbon also voted Western No. 35 in its preseason poll.
Star center adjusting to new-found fame

By OF STAPLETON
The Daily News

"Chris Marcus probably is the most popular student currently at Western Kentucky University in the history of Western Kentucky University."

"Marcus is a member of the Associated Press All-American team at the end of last season. The 7-0, 240 lb. center said he ＇grew up about 50 interview questions."

He has been on virtually every pre-season publications list of top players and also in a finalist for the Wooden and Naismith Awards.

"After being named to The Associated Press All-American team at the end of last season, the 7-0, 240 lb. center said he ＇grew up about 50 interview questions."

Marcus knew he had a job to do this season - and that means winning the Sun Belt Conference championship and taking the Hilltoppers back to the NCAA Tournament.

"The best part of last season was winning all those games on the road and beating people by 20, Marcus said. "The best was when we beat South Alabama down there and getting to go to New Orleans (for the NCAA Tournament)."

"Riding back to the hotel with our little cap on, you know, Marcus told reporters, "I just wanna go to eight different teams just to stay in the league."

Despite how that turned out, Marcus has a job to do this season - and that means winning the Sun Belt Conference championship and taking the Hilltoppers back to the NCAA Tournament.

Marcus is a member of the Associated Press All-American team at the end of last season. The 7-0, 240 lb. center said he ＇grew up about 50 interview questions.

"Marcus is a member of the Associated Press All-American team at the end of last season. The 7-0, 240 lb. center said he ＇grew up about 50 interview questions."

Did Marcus have any idea that he would end up in the spotlight? "I don't want to be that guy, " he said. "I just want to have fun. I don't want to go to eight different teams just to stay in the league."

Marcus knows he has a job to do this season - and that means winning the Sun Belt Conference championship and taking the Hilltoppers back to the NCAA Tournament.

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**WKU center left off AP’s All-America player picks**

Chris Marcus listed only on the 'others receiving votes' category

By the Daily News and The Associated Press

Western Kentucky senior center Chris Marcus was left off The Associated Press preseason All-America team, which was announced Tuesday afternoon.

Marcus led the nation in rebounding last season with 12.1 per game, but was listed only on the “others receiving votes” category.

“We’re really proud that Chris is an All-American,” WKU coach Dennis Felton said.

“My wife and I are really proud that Chris is an All-American at Western Kentucky.”

Marcus has been named to several other All-American teams.

The AP’s first team, meanwhile, was made up of Duke’s Jason Williams, Missouri’s Kareem Rush, Kentucky’s Tayshaun Prince, Stanford’s Casey Jacobson and Illinois’ Frank Williams.

Felton said he thought that since all the first-teamers played in big conferences with plenty of television exposure, they probably had a step up on Marcus.

“Certainly, I think that when you’re on TV a lot, you’re exposed to more of the media members that see WKU CENTER, 3C

**DAILY NEWS, BOWLING GREEN, KENTUCKY**

**WKU CENTER**

are doing the voting,” Felton said.

The only other player from a mid-major conference to get votes was Dan Dickau from Gonzaga.

Jason Williams, who led Duke to the national championship last season, was a unanimous selection and the first player on every ballot since 1996.

Jason Williams was on each of the 72 ballots from the national media panel that selects the weekly college basketball poll, becoming the first unanimous preseason pick since Tim Duncan of Wake Forest five years ago.

Williams averaged 21.6 points last season – the first Blue Devil to lead the Atlantic Coast Conference in scoring since Danny Ferry in 1989 – 3.3 rebounds and 6.1 assists. He was the only player to rank in the top 20 nationally in scoring (15th) and assists (19th) as Duke won its third national championship.

The second-ranked Blue Devils lost player of the year Shane Battier and fifth-year forward Nate James, but Williams, who averaged 25.7 points in the NCAA tournament, will lead the way as they try to become the first team to repeat since Duke did it in 1992.

Rush, the preseason Big 12 Player of the Year, was the second-leading vote getter with 47, one more than Prince and two more than Jacobson.

The 6-foot-6 Rush led the conference in scoring last season with a 21.1 average. His run at national preseason honors was hurt when he missed seven games with a thumb injury on his shooting (left) hand.

Prince, the Southeastern Conference Player of the Year, withdrew his name from the NBA draft to return for his senior season with the Wildcats. The 6-9 Prince belied his thin frame by playing at power forward last season and wound up a second-team All-American after averaging 16.9 points and 6.5 rebounds.

Jacobson is going to draw a lot of attention from opposing defenses this season as the only returning leading vote-getter with 47, one more than Prince and two more than Jacobson.

Prince returns to the Fighting Illini after being selected Big Ten Player of the Year and a third-team All-American. The 6-3 guard averaged 14.9 points, 3.7 rebounds and 4.4 assists.
Marcus out 4-6 weeks with stress fracture

BY OJ STAPLETON
The Daily News
ojstapleton@bgdailynews.com/783-3239

WKU coach Dennis Felton is impressed with Vandy's high shooting percentage.

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INSIDE

Marcus was averaging 14.6 points and 9.2 rebounds per game despite being unable to practice with the team.

The 7-foot-1 center could return in late December for the beginning of the Sun Belt Conference schedule, but will almost definitely miss crucial games at Austin Peay and Southern Mississippi along with the rematch with Creighton in Diddle Arena on Dec. 19.

Marcus is outfitted with a removable cast and will still be able to do some conditioning work that doesn't involve putting pressure on his foot.

"The hope is that when this is over, he will be pain free for the first time in a real long time," Felton said. "He's going to get totally off it and not put any pressure on it at all during the time that it is healing."

Marcus will also continue to travel with the team, which is in the middle of a four-game road trip, and took the news well, according to Felton.

Despite the loss, Felton said he still doesn't think the Hilltoppers will miss a beat.

"I don't expect us to take a step backwards at all, to be honest," Felton said.

The WKU coach declined to say just who would start in Marcus' spot, but the two most likely candidates figure to be 6-9 sophomore Todor Pandov or 6-8 junior Nate Williams.

If Western's last game is any indication, it will likely be Pandov. When Marcus fouled out in the first overtime of the Hilltoppers' 94-91 loss at Creighton, Pandov replaced Marcus and stayed in for the remainder of the contest.

Newcomer Caleb Halcomb, a 6-10 junior college transfer, also figures to see an increase in his minutes as well.

"This certainly is an opportunity (for them) to do more. That's 28 minutes that he has played a game this year that will be opened up to other players," Felton said. "We don't have another Chris Marcus on our team, but I'm confident in those other guys to do what we need them to do."
Marcus takes Toppers to another level

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. — For anyone who saw Chris Marcus play last year, it's painfully obvious that he's not even close to being 100 percent right now.

He's not even 75 percent.

But, oh, what a player he still is.

"Chris Marcus at 50 percent is a lot better than a lot of guys are at 100 percent," Boyden said after Thursdays win over Arkansas-Little Rock. "Just him being in there and offering shots and getting blocks really gives us confidence. We get excited every time he comes in the game and contributes."

While it's impossible to predict with any level of certainty what the outcome would have been had Marcus not played, it's not exactly a leap of faith to think the Toppers might not be Sun Belt East Division champs without him.

On defense, Marcus swatted away eight shots and just plain scared the Trojans from bringing the ball anywhere near him and the basket.

"He really affects you defensively," UALR coach Porter Moser said. "He blocked eight shots and probably altered another eight. That's where he really has an impact on this team."

WKU coach Dennis Felton agreed.

"He was a very strong force for us tonight," Felton said. "He was awfully impressive and a lot of those blocks we were able to recover the loose ball, because he blocked it in a way that allowed us to."

The most amazing part is that he didn't even have to jump for most of his blocks. It was all just instinct.

Of course, he wasn't exactly a slouch on offense either.

Marcus was 4-of-7 from the field for 12 points. At times, when he was fed the ball in the low post, he simply turned and went up and over the Trojans' defenders as if they were playing for Drakes Creek Middle School.

"He's just so hard to move down there. In post defense, you teach guys to move their opponents as far out of the paint as you can. With him, he's just so big, you can't move him," Moser said.

To compensate for their inability to move him out of the block, the Trojans routinely double-teamed Marcus. That left one of his teammates open on the outside for a good look at the basket.

"It is part of their defensive scheme to double the low post, regardless of who it is. They do it against all their opponents. They didn't double a few of our post players sometimes," Felton said.

"Nate (Williams) didn't get doubled a few times and David didn't get doubled a few times, but they went with their tendency against Chris."

Yes, Marcus is back. Even if he isn't in top playing shape, he's still plenty good enough to mess with his opponents' heads and get an easy putback here and there.

While that's good for the Toppers as a team, it might not be that great for some of them individually.

During the last four games, Boyden has established himself as an All-Conference player. Whether he makes the list at the end of the season is shaky.

Even though he missed most of the season with a stress fracture, Marcus will still get plenty of votes, as will Derek Robinson.

While there's no doubt all three deserve the honor, it might be tough for one team — even one as good as WKU — to get three players on the 10-man All-Conference list.

"It's just going to be interesting to see how many of the (Hilltoppers) people vote for," Moser said. "I could sit there and vote for about six of them."

— OJ Stapleton is the sports editor of the Daily News.
Marcus named to all-district team

Chris Marcus, a 7-1, 285-pound senior center on Western Kentucky University Hilltopper basketball team, has been named to the National Association of Basketball Coaches and Pontiac Division I All-District 7 Second Team.

Marcus, a virtual consensus preseason All-America pick, has averaged 13.1 points and 8.6 rebounds a game for Coach Dennis Felton’s ‘01-02 Hilltoppers, who stand 22-3 on the season and have already sewed up the Sun Belt Conference East Division championship with an 11-1 record to date.

Marcus made the NABC team despite missing 17 of the Toppers’ 25 game to date with a foot injury. He played in Western’s first five games, all in November, and then returned to action Feb. 3. The Hilltoppers are 7-1 in games when Marcus played and 15-2 in the other 17 contests. He was a first-team NABC All-District pick as a junior last season.
Out of left field

FEB 22, 2002

DAILY NEWS

Out of left field

Marcus looks for a strong Diddle finale

On Saturday night, Bowling Green will say goodbye to three very special basketball players.

Western Kentucky seniors Tremain Rowles, Derek Robinson and Chris Marcus will play their final game in E.A. Diddle Arena against Middle Tennessee at 7 p.m.

Those players represent coach Dennis Felton's recruiting class. The huge success of both this and last season was built upon their backs.

Each has been vital in his own way, but no one has been bigger — both figuratively and literally — than Marcus.

The 7-foot-1-inch center has served as a lightning rod, drawing the attention of national media to Southcentral Kentucky.

Even Felton, who is always the first to jump up and proclaim that this is not a one-man team, knows that without Marcus, the Hilltopper revival may not have come about.

"If people were to be more attracted to one player more than they are to a whole team’s success — big, big success like we’ve had — it would be awfully disappointing. I know some of that is true, though," Felton admitted.

Of course, Marcus was only the catalyst. While he was nursing his stress fracture, the Topper's stomped through the Sun Belt Conference like an angry giant.

While Rows and Robinson both have no other option other than moving on after this season, Marcus could come back.

Because he sat out his freshman season as an academic non-qualifier, when he graduates in May, Marcus could be reinstated for one more go round.

He has said on more than one occasion this year that he doesn’t plan on using that option, and it looks like he's going to stick to his word.

"I do think about (coming back) from time to time, especially when I'm out here having fun with the guys, winning games and just enjoying college," Marcus said. "I think about that stuff a lot, but it's time for me to make the next step. I'm ready to move on and it's something I'm looking forward to."

The next step is the NBA.

Marcus will be a sure-fire lottery pick and instant millionaire come June.

First things first, though. The big man still has one more show to put on for the people of Bowling Green, and he's looking to make Senior Night something special.

"I want to go out with a bang. I'm just looking to play well and hopefully have fun and soak it all in," Marcus said.

Before the season began, Marcus said he planned on taking a 3-pointer before the season was out. There's only one game left in the regular season, and he said after the win over North Texas that if Western has the game well in hand against Middle Tennessee, he will step out behind the arc and put one up.

There's also a good possibility he will rewrite the record book against the Blue Raiders.

Marcus needs just one more block to break Clarence Martin's Western record of 198 career blocked shots.

He tied the record with two vs. Kentucky State on Tuesday, the same night he also scored his 1,000th point.

"I didn't even know that. The big thing that night was getting into the 1,000-point club," Marcus said. "It would be neat to go out by breaking that record. That would be nice, but the most important thing is getting a win."

"Middle Tennessee, they ain't no Kentucky State. They're going to come in here expecting to win."

It's a typical Hilltopper response. Individual honors are fine, as long as we win.

With players like that, it's no wonder WKU is back on top.

— OJ Stapleton is the sports editor of the Daily News. His column runs every Friday.
Marcus earns SBC Player of Week honors

By the Daily News FEB 26 2002

For the second time this season, Western Kentucky center Chris Marcus has been named Sun Belt Conference Player of the Week.

The 7-foot-1 Marcus combined to score 59 points and pull down 26 rebounds in wins over Kentucky State and Middle Tennessee.

He was also selected as Player of the Week after the first week of the season when he led the Hilltoppers to wins over Kentucky and George Washington en route to the NABC Classic championship in Lexington.

Marcus missed 17 games in the middle of the season with a stress fracture, and his games against Kentucky State and Middle Tennessee were just the fifth and sixth since returning from the injury.

After Saturday's win over the Blue Raiders, Marcus said he felt like he was at about 90 percent. “I've still got to get in better shape,” Marcus said. “My shot's still not quite there yet either, but it's going to come.”

The only other WKU player to win Player of the Week honors this season is David Boyden, who was honored Feb. 11 after leading the Toppers to road wins over Arkansas-Little Rock and Arkansas State.

Marcus is the third Sun Belt athlete to win the award twice this season. New Mexico State guard Eric Channing and Louisiana-Lafayette freshman center Michael Southall were also honored twice.

In addition to the Sun Belt award, Marcus was also named national Star of the Week by CollegeInsider.com.
Felton, Marcus

Western Kentucky University's Chris Marcus and Dennis Felton have added yet another accolade to the list of honors they have received in the 2002 postseason.

Basketball America has selected Felton as its Sun Belt Conference Coach of the Year, while including Marcus, a 7-foot-1 senior center from Charlotte, N.C., on its All-America Team as an honorable mention pick. The national basketball publication also picked Marcus as its Sun Belt Conference Player of the Year.

Felton, in his fourth year as head coach of the Hilltoppers, has been honored in a similar manner by both the Sun Belt Conference coaches and media and by CollegeInsider.com.

Marcus, who averaged 15.9 points and 8.9 rebounds an outing for the Hilltoppers, earned the honor despite missing 17 games due to injury.
Heads above the class

Western Kentucky basketball star Chris Marcus walked with the rest of his senior classmates Sunday, receiving his degree in sociology during a commencement ceremony.
Western's Marcus springs surprise, will return to Hilltoppers next season

Basketball found its way back to the top of Kentucky's sports marquee last week.

The good news involved Western Kentucky's Chris Marcus. Projected as high as a No. 7 pick in the NBA draft this month, which would guarantee him nearly $3 million, and having said he was anxious to move on, the 7-1 center announced Friday he would return to the Hilltoppers for another season.

Marcus skipped the patriotic speech about wanting to remain a Hilltopper, telling media instead, "it's my foot. I'm not ready to compete in the NBA yet."

Hilltoppers coach Dennis Felton: "... there is no doubt that everyone involved is going to benefit from this decision, starting with Chris. "Our team will certainly benefit from his presence in the middle, and I know Western Kentucky fans across the country will rejoice at the sight of Chris in a Hilltopper uniform next season."

College basketball fans everywhere should be gratified by Marcus's decision. He will be a millionaire soon enough. Meantime, his decision and demeanor make him a poster boy for an NCAA looking for better images as college basketball players hopscotch to other schools and (some) jump impetuously to the uncertainty of professional basketball too soon.

Marcus's decision, coupled with 28 Western wins last season and a renovated Diddle Arena, should vault Hilltopper hoops into the Top 20 in preseason rankings and make WKU a hot ticket for home games and candidate for regional telecasting.

Footnote: Maybe Louisville coach Rick Pitino's personal reasons for not fulfilling that school's contract with Western, had to do with a scouting report on the 2002-03 Hilltoppers roster that returns virtually intact.
Marcus unable to rehab following ankle surgery

By OJ STAPLETON
The Daily News  JUN 19 2002
ojstapleton@thepressnews.com/937-2299

Marcus surgery deemed a success

By the Daily News
Chris Marcus, Western Kentucky University's 7-foot-1, 285-pound center, underwent surgery on his left foot Monday in Birmingham, Ala.

The routine procedure to repair a bone in the left ankle area of the All-America senior from Charlotte, N.C., (Olympic High School) was deemed a success.

The doctors were pleased with what they found and felt the procedure was a total success," Hilltopper coach Dennis Felton said. "They found the injured bone to be very strong and healthy. It all really looked as good as it possibly could."

The procedure, which took place at the HealthSouth Medical Center in Birmingham, began at about 4 p.m. and took about an hour and 40 minutes.

Dr. John Gould, an internationally recognized foot and ankle expert with Alabama Sports Medicine, handled the procedure.

Marcus, who announced May 31 that he would withdraw his name from consideration for the NBA Draft and, instead, return to WKU for his final year of eligibility, has been hobbled by the injury since before the start of the 2001-02 season. As a result, he appeared in just 15 games last year, averaging 15.9 points and 8.9 rebounds per outing. He was projected as a high first-round draft pick in the NBA Draft later this month before changing his mind and opting for the rehabilitation time and a fourth year on the Hill.

If Marcus were in the cast for three months, he would have only about one month to get in shape before the beginning of practice.

Felton said he isn't sure if that is enough time for Marcus to be ready to play in the Hilltoppers' first game of the regular season.

"I've never had any expectations. My only hope is that he is healthy this time next year for his future," Felton said. "I don't have any expectations as to when he might play again for Western Kentucky."

Marcus played in only 15 of the Hilltoppers' 32 games last season because of the injury, which was initially diagnosed as a sprain before being upgraded to a stress fracture five games into the season.

He averaged 15.9 points and 8.9 rebounds a game. As a junior, he led the nation in rebounding with 12.1 rpg.

Marcus will not be able to do any conditioning other than upper-body work.

"It's going to be a real challenge because he won't be able to do much while he's in the cast," said Western Kentucky coach Dennis Felton. "He'll have a lot of work to do when he's out of it."

Felton said there is no way to tell how long Marcus will be in the cast.

At last month's new conference when Marcus announced his decision to return to WKU for another season, the time in the cast was estimated to be about three months.

"That was a conservative estimate," Felton said. "We really don't have any expectations."

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The waiting game begins

Western center Chris Marcus finds ways to occupy time following ankle surgery

By OJ STAPLETON
The Daily News

Chris Marcus doesn’t have a whole lot of stuff to occupy his time these days.

He’s been in a cast since his ankle surgery earlier this month, which really limits what he can do. Mainly, he watches television, plays video games on his PlayStation 2, does some workouts with his upper body and calls home to talk to his family in Charlotte, N.C.

Oh yeah, he’s taken up yoga, too.

“That’s one of the hardest things I’ve ever done, because it teaches you to bend in ways you’re not used to. “You learn to use muscles you might not normally use,” Marcus said. “For a big guy like me, with my longer limbs, that’s something I’m going to stick with. It teaches you how to breath and stretch out right and that’s something I’m going to need down the line.”

At 7-foot, 1-inch, Marcus has plenty of stretching to do.

When Marcus says “down the road,” he’s talking about his future NBA career — something he had to put off for a year because the stress fracture in his foot had not fully healed.

Had he been healthy, Marcus would have spent Wednesday night in New York at the NBA Draft. Instead, he spent the night watching the draft unfold from his Bowling Green dorm room.

“I wondered what would have happened if I had kept my name in it and had been hurt — or even if I had been healthy,” Marcus said. “If I had been healthy all year, I wonder where I would have been picked at.”

Marcus said he probably would have been picked “somewhere in the 20s,” but admitted he was very surprised when his former Sun Belt Conference rival, Jason Jennings, was drafted 43rd by the Portland Trailblazers.

“I didn’t think he’d go that much behind (Stanford center Curtis) Borchardt,” Marcus said. “For him to go 43rd — that’s just kinda telling me that there’s a lot of work still to be done.”

Before he can get back to work, however, Marcus will have to get out of his cast.

Marcus said new x-rays were taken of his ankle Friday and everything looked good.

“I think I might get out of this (cast) in about four and a half more weeks,” he said. “Hopefully I’ll be walking before school starts in the fall.”

See MARCUS, 48

Marcus, from 1B

fall. That’s my main thing right now.”

Even after he’s out of the cast, Marcus will have to take it easy before he starts running and jumping again.

“I’d love to start playing as soon as I get this cast off, but I think coach (Dennis) Felton is going to be very, very, very cautious,” Marcus said. “I think he’s going to be very overprotective because he doesn’t want the same thing to happen this year that happened last year.”

He also has to pass one more class to get his final year of eligibility.

Marcus will be taking another shot at the pesky Spanish class during the second summer session, beginning next week.

“I think this will be the best time to take it because I get to go to class every day. I’m not traveling on the road, so I’m not going to miss any class,” Marcus said. “The thing about learning Spanish is you’ve got to be there every day. If you miss one day, that’s going to set you back.”

“Plus, I don’t have anything else to do, so that’s the only thing I’m going to be concentrating on.”

Once he gets Spanish behind him, it will be smooth sailing academically, as Marcus said he doesn’t plan to take too many difficult classes.

“I don’t want to make it sound like I’m trying to get out of work — but ... I’m going to use this year to concentrate on basketball, because I’ve already got my degree,” Marcus said.
Marcus chosen as Wooden candidate

Marcus chosen as Wooden candidate

By the Daily News  
Aug 3, 2002

Just like last year, Chris Marcus is starting to rack up preseason honors.

The Western Kentucky center has been selected to the Wooden Award Preseason All-American Team when he was first selected last summer.

The 10-man, Wooden Award All-American Team will be announced April 13, in ceremonies at the Los Angeles Athletic Club.

Marcus was going to enter the NBA Draft after last season, but decided to return to WKU for his final year of eligibility with the Hilltoppers.

A three-year starter for the Toppers, Marcus is a two-time All-American and was the 2000-01 Sun Belt Conference Player-of-the-Year after leading the nation in rebounding (12.1 rpg) that season.

Marcus is the only player from the Sun Belt Conference selected on the '02-'03 preseason team.

Two other basketball players from Kentucky were also honored: Keith Bogans from Kentucky and Louisville's Reece Gaines.

The Top 50 candidates were selected based on last year's individual performances and team records, Marcus was the first Hilltopper to be honored on the Wooden Award Preseason All-American Team.
Unfortunately for Marcus, he can't be out there just yet. His injured ankle just won't let him.

After having surgery over the summer, Marcus has been slowly but steadily rehabilitating his foot to try and get ready for basketball season.

"It's feeling great compared to where I was a month ago. As each week goes by, it keeps getting a little bit better," Marcus said. "It gets stiff after workouts, but that's about it. That pain isn't there anymore."

Right now, Marcus is just doing conditioning work on stationary bikes and treadmills. He's not done any running or jumping at all.

"I do shoot around a little to try and get my form back," Marcus said.

Just when the 7-1 center will be ready to resume normal basketball practice is still up in the air.

"I'm not going to come back until I'm 100 percent sure that I'm going to be my old self," Marcus said. "I told my teammates that I would love to be back for the Arizona game, but we're not going to put any timetable on it."

Marcus seemed doubtful that he would be ready to play against Arizona in the Hilltoppers' regular season opener Nov. 23, but wouldn't say for sure that he would not play.

"Anything is possible," Marcus said.

The only thing that is sure is that he's not going to rush himself back, like he did last year.

His injury first occurred just before the Hilltoppers' first exhibition game last season against the Harlem Globetrotters.

After playing in the first five games of the regular season with what was thought to be a sprained ankle, Marcus was sidelined when the injury was rediagnosed as a stress fracture.

Marcus sat out for two months before returning in early February, but it was clear he was not 100 percent as he finished the season.

Throughout the season, Marcus said his plan was to go into the NBA rather than return for his final season at WKU.

"I just want to get back to the NCAA Tournament and win a game," he said. "I'm tired of being one and done. You know what they say. 'The third time's a charm.'"
WKU center may sit out the rest of the season

By OJ STAPLETON JAN 22 2003
The Daily News
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It looks like Chris Marcus will be back on the shelf for the immediate future.

Western Kentucky's 7-foot-1 center saw his surgeon in Birmingham, Ala., on Monday and was told to "lay off playing basketball for a while," according to Marcus.

"There's still some more inflammation in the talus, so we're going to go get a second opinion. That's just about it," Marcus said.

Marcus first injured his ankle prior to the 2001-02 season. He played in five games before sitting out the next 17.

His changed his plans to enter the NBA draft over the summer so he could have offseason surgery and return to Western for a final season.

After missing the first 12 games this season, Marcus returned to the court Jan. 4 at Middle Tennessee.

He has seen action in four of the past five contests, despite being in pain each time he took the court.

Marcus did not play in the second half of the Hilltoppers' Saturday game against South Alabama after telling team trainers that the pain was too much.

"I've been in a lot of pain and it's not been allowing me to do what I've needed to do, especially like running and getting in shape," Marcus said. "Right now, I've just got to make another decision about what's best for me."

That decision basically comes down to two options.

"I can either keep playing and hope it gets better or I can sit out and give it a rest," Marcus said. "Right now, I'm probably leaning toward sitting out for a little while to let it heal up some more."

If he decides to rest the left foot, Marcus said he was not sure when or if ever - he would return to the court.

"Honestly, I'm not even putting a timeline on it as to whether I will or won't come back at any time during the regular season or if we make it to the tournament," Marcus said. "I've just got to make the best decision that will get me healthy."
In the summer of 2001, Chris Marcus seemed to have all the time in the world.

After completing his junior season with mind-boggling statistics, the former Western Kentucky center planned to play one more year of college basketball, get his degree and then enter the NBA draft and become a multimillionaire.

"I think it was D-Rob" - former WKU guard Derek Robinson - "that said, 'Do you realize that if you wanted to, you could be a millionaire?' I just kinda laughed and tried to take it in stride," Marcus said in July 2001. "If it's here this year, it'll be here next year with an even better opportunity."

The easygoing big man had no idea that an unlucky turn of his left ankle would derail all his plans.


No big deal - he played 14 minutes the next day in the Red-White scrimmage. He played in a pair of exhibition games and he played in five regular-season games.

But what seemed a simple sprain just didn't seem to be getting any better.

Then, following a loss to Creighton, Marcus' injury took a dramatic turn - the sprain, it was discovered, was actually a stress fracture.

After sitting out several weeks, Marcus returned for the final 10 games of the season.

He still planned on entering the 2002 NBA draft, but when it became apparent that his ankle still wasn't healed, he took his name out so he could undergo surgery, rehab, play the 2002-03 college season and then enter the draft.

Well, the 2003 NBA draft came and went Thursday night, and Marcus' name wasn't called.

In recent weeks, Marcus has had individual workouts for NBA scouts to show that his ankle was sound.

Obviously, the scouts must still have some rather large doubts, because if Marcus were healthy, at least one NBA general manager would risk a draft pick on the big man.

The one-time, sure-fire lottery pick is now the poster child for why college basketball players should leave school early.

It's sad really, because when Marcus was right, he could dominate a game like few college players.

On Nov. 25, 2000, against Tennessee State, he nearly became the first Western player ever to record a triple-double with 12 points, 21 rebounds and nine blocked shots.

Even when he wasn't completely healthy, he could still be a great player. He took over the second half of the 2002 Sun Belt Conference championship and helped Western win its second straight title.

Maybe things will still work out for Marcus - he can still sign a free agent contract with an NBA team and compete for a roster spot.

If that happens, Hilltopper fans can follow one of their former stars in the world's premier basketball league.

If not, they will simply have the memories of the soft-spoken 7-footer and the questions of what could have been.

— OJ Stapleton is the sports editor of the Daily News.

See STAPLETON, 3C
WKU's Marcus gets another shot

It's 1,566 miles from Charlotte, North Carolina to Denver, Colo. It must seem even farther to Chris Marcus.

Marcus, the former Western Kentucky honorable mention All-American center, was once a lock to go in the first three picks in the NBA draft. But that was after his sophomore season in Bowling Green when the seven foot, then 285 pound big man was the apple of NBA scouts' eyes.

Marcus made what was the popular decision and returned to college at WKU (where he eventually got his degree in sociology.) Then while playing in a summer pickup game Marcus twisted an ankle. The pain from the supposed sprain lingered longer than doctors had speculated. Further tests revealed that Marcus had suffered a hairline fracture in a bone near his ankle.

Two years, a few surgeries and hours of rehab later, Marcus declared himself fit to test the NBA waters despite playing in only 19 games in his junior and senior seasons combined. This time, doctors agreed and Marcus was again an interesting figure on the draft boards of NBA teams.

As the first round came and went with high schoolers, college undergrads and foreign players all going at a regular pace, Marcus' name was not called. The second round came and went in the same fashion. Despite his enthusiasm and the enthusiasm of his supporters, Marcus still was not drafted by an NBA team. That, as it turns out, may have been the best thing to happen to him.

It's often said by NBA experts that it is better to go undrafted than to go in the second round of the draft. The allure of the first round is obvious, with guaranteed contracts for all first round draftees, but the second round promises nothing but a chance to make a team.

Going undrafted allows a player to choose where he will go, finding the best situation for him to not only gain a spot on an NBA roster, but to improve for the future. That spot for Chris Marcus was in Denver.

Signing with a team that tied for the NBA's worst record last season may not seem like a great opportunity, but look a little closer. Playing in Denver ensures that a draft pick won't be counted on to turn around a franchise that has been struggling for several years. The lack of quality on the roster helps a player with an upside like Marcus to catch on and work in slowly.

Marcus is still doing some rehab on the foot that likely cost him a lottery pick's contract and NCAA stardom for the last two years, but he's got what he wanted all along, a chance. The window for most NBA free agents is small. But for a player who once led the NCAA in rebounding and is the all time leader in blocked shots at a school where Jim McDaniels played, the window may stay open just a little bit longer.

It's been a long, tough trip, but hopefully for Marcus the destination will be well worth it.
Briefly

Marcus decides to leave Nuggets

Former Western Kentucky center Chris Marcus has left the Denver Nuggets for personal reasons, according to Wednesday's Denver Post.

Marcus was hampered by injuries his last two seasons at Western, playing in four games his final year and averaging 3 points and 3 rebounds in 39 minutes.

He signed with the Nuggets in late June as an undrafted free agent, and according to the Post had been asked by Nuggets officials to bring his weight down from 325 to 275 pounds.
Marcus to get opportunity with Nuggets

By the Daily News  SEP 26 2003

Published in The Associated Press

DENVER — Former Western Kentucky center Chris Marcus signed a contract with the NBA's Denver Nuggets on Thursday.

Terms were not released, but the Denver Post reported it is a one-year, guaranteed deal that will pay Marcus a rookie minimum contract of $366,931 next season, with a team option for a second season.

"He's had to go through a lot of stuff both on and off the court and I'm glad he's got this great opportunity," said Western graduate assistant David Boyden, who was Marcus' teammate for four years at WKU. "I'm just glad someone gave him a chance to do what everybody around here knows he is capable of."

Marcus was invited to the Nuggets' camp as a free agent after he was not drafted in June.

He was projected as a high, first-round pick following his sophomore season when he led the Hilltoppers to their first Sun Belt Conference championship under then-coach Dennis Felton.

During the 2000-01 campaign, Marcus led the nation in rebounding with 12.1 per game and also averaged 16.7 points.

Marcus injured his left foot in the 2001-02 season and played the first five games of the season before the injury was found to be a stress fracture.

From that point Marcus struggled to come back and was never fully healthy again while at Western Kentucky.

"Chris has experienced some setbacks with injuries, but he has worked very hard to earn this opportunity," Nuggets general manager Kiki Vandeweghe said. "We feel he has a very bright future."

Marcus averaged 14.1 points, 10.1 rebounds and 2.71 blocks in 79-game career at WKU.

Hilltopper fans interested in seeing Marcus will have a good opportunity early in the preseason schedule when the Nuggets play at the Indiana Pacers on Oct. 15.
Ankle injury frustrating for Tops’ big man

Marcus confident teammates will step up in his absence

By OJ STAPLETON
The Daily News

Marcus (Williams), Caleb (Halcomb) and David (Boyden) are going to step up and are going to hold in down in the middle,” Marcus said. “Then when I come back, I’m just going to work myself back into the groove.”

Western Kentucky’s Chris Marcus walks with crutches Sunday at the Gaylord Entertainment Center in Nashville, Tenn.

said. “Since I was knee-high, my father always told me if a guy’s open, give them the ball. That’s just basketball and I’ve got faith in my teammates to make their shots.”

More than Marcus

If there is a silver lining to Marcus’ injury, it’s this — the Hilltoppers now have a chance to prove to any doubters that they’re more than just a one-player team.

“We’re anxious to do that for those that haven’t figured it out yet,” WKU coach Dennis Felton said. “We don’t think about that as much as what we thought about when Chris was here and

INJURY

that’s just to get better every day.”

Western forward David Boyden thinks that playing without Marcus will help the rest of the team develop.

“In the long run, this will only make us better,” Boyden said. “We’re all going to have to step up our play and our concentration, because Chris covers up a lot of mistakes.”

Tee’d up

Felton was whistled for his first technical foul of the season Sunday when gesturing a travel call toward an official.

The Western coach said he was surprised about the call when it happened.

“I told the official that I couldn’t understand how I could get the technical from about 80 feet away and I didn’t utter a word,” Felton said. “I don’t get many technicals, and that’s another reason why it surprised me.”

Falling down

Western Kentucky fell to 25th in the latest ESPNUSA Today Coaches Poll, which was completed before Sunday’s loss.

The Hilltoppers are almost certainly going to completely drop out of the Associated Press poll, which comes out later today.

With no games remaining against high-profile opponents on Western’s schedule, it will be tough to break back in, but the Hilltoppers want to get back there.

We think about it a lot,” Raynardo Curry said. “When we were ranked, we had a lot of fans. Now I don’t know if they’re still going to come. We’ve still got to bring it to the floor every day and play hard and just stay as a family.”
Marcus may return

Hilltopper big man expected to back out of NBA quest, return for final year

By OJ STAPLETON  MAY 31  2002
The Daily News
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Chris Marcus is expected to announce that he will return for another season at Western Kentucky in a news conference today at 4 p.m., according to a source close to the situation.

The 7-foot-1 center had entered his name into the NBA Draft, but can still withdraw because he has not yet signed with an agent.

Marcus just completed his senior season, but can come back for one more season because he could not play as a nonqualifier as a freshman and graduated in four years.

He seemed determined to enter the NBA draft earlier this month, but has dropped toward the bottom of the first round in many projections.

"Once I make a decision, I'm going to stick with my word," Marcus said just prior to his graduation. "I've said I'm going to come out, so I'm coming out."

During this past season, Marcus averaged 15.9 points and 8.9 rebounds per game, but played in just 15 games after missing most of the season with a stress fracture in his left ankle.

He was out from Dec. 28 to Feb. 3, but fought to get back in shape during the last month of the season and never really returned to his dominant form.

If he is able to put in a full season next year, Marcus could make a dent in the Western Kentucky record books. He already holds the career record with 212 blocks and is just 569 points from breaking into the top 10 of all-time scorers at WKU.

Marcus is 1,137 points behind Jim McDaniel, the record holder for points in a career.

Marcus led the NCAA in rebounding as a junior with 374. He was also an Associated Press All-American as well as the Sun Belt Conference Player of the Year and Defensive Player of the Year.

He was named to the SBC All-Tournament team in 2002 as the Hilltoppers won their second straight conference title.
Injury brings Marcus back

By DJ STAPLETON
The Daily News

The injured ankle that caused Marcus, to miss most of the 2001-02 season will also keep him out of the NBA Draft this year.

Marcus announced Friday that his injured ankle is still painful, and he is physically unable to play in the NBA this year.

Marcus, a 6-11 guard, was disappointed to postpone his dream of playing in the NBA for another year, but he is trying to keep it in perspective.

"This is just another setback," Marcus said. "Now I get a chance to better myself and become a better basketball player."

WKU head trainer Mike Gaddie said the surgery was a "routine procedure," and that it would be performed some time this month.

After the surgery, Marcus will be in a cast for up to three months before beginning rehabilitation.

Gaddie said there was no definite timeframe for Marcus' return, but he was "extremely optimistic" that Marcus would be ready for the beginning of basketball practice in October.

Gaddie also added that Marcus did not do further damage to his ankle when he returned to play in the final 10 games last season.

Marcus said he was somewhat disappointed to postpone his dream of playing in the NBA for another year, but he is trying to keep it in perspective.

"This is just another setback," Marcus said. "Now I get a chance to better myself and become a better basketball player."

Marcus said he currently weighs around 320 pounds, and would like to be down around 300 or 305 before the season begins.

That's going to be a challenge because I'm going to be in a cast and that is going to limit some of the things I can do," he said. "I got a lot of time to do it, and that's a good thing."

Western coach Dennis Felton said he is pleased that Marcus will be spending one more year on the Hill, and that the extra season will help him increase his position in the NBA Draft.

"I certainly believe that Chris will ultimately be one of the first, second or third picks in the NBA Draft," Felton said. "In the meantime, any time that he gets to spend in a Hilltopper uniform is a great time for us."

Felton had not been expecting Marcus to announce his decision to return and play with the Hilltoppers next season instead of entering the NBA Draft.

"He had no choice but to do it," Felton said.

"He had no choice but to do it," Felton said. "He had no choice but to do it."
Coaches react to Marcus’ return

By OJ STAPLETON
The Daily News
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When Arkansas-Little Rock men’s basketball coach Porter Moser heard the news about Chris Marcus’ return to Western Kentucky, he said he nearly ran off the side of the road.

Just like the villain from a bad horror-movie sequel, Marcus will once again be terrorizing the opposition in the Sun Belt Conference.

Florida International coach Donnie Marsh didn’t even believe the news when he first heard about it.

“My son came running down the stairs the other night and said ‘Dad, did you see what they just ran across ESPN? He told me Chris Marcus was coming back and I just said ‘Yeah, right.’ I had to watch it for myself,” Marsh said.

The 7-foot-1 center said Friday that he would be coming back for one more season at WKU because his injured foot, which caused him to miss 17 games last season, still is not properly healed.

He still needs one more summer course to complete his degree. Once he does, he will get back the year of eligibility he lost as an academic nonqualifier as a freshman.

“He should be applauded because he has improved so much as a player and has put himself in this position where he can make this decision because he has graduated,” Moser said. “That really says something about him and the Western Kentucky coaching staff.”

Prior to last season, the Sun Belt coaches showed just how much they respected Marcus by naming him preseason Player of the Year and making Western Kentucky the team to beat by unanimously picking the Toppers to win the SBC East Division.

Now it looks like history will be repeating itself.

New Mexico State coach Lou Henson said he thought WKU had the best returning team even before Marcus made his announcement last Friday.

“Last year they were an excellent ballclub when he was not there, but without question, when he is there, they are much better. With him coming back, they are by far the cream of the crop in the league,” Henson said.

Both Moser and Marsh also said they thought Western would once again be the team to beat, but they were not sure if Marcus would once again be the preseason Player of the Year pick.

“I don’t know that it will be so clear-cut because of his injury,” Marsh said. “No one really knows what to expect, I thought there was an infusion of some terrific talent this past year with (Louisiana-Lafayette’s Michael) Southall, (FIU’s Taurrance) Johnson, (Arkansas-Little Rock’s Nick) Zachery and (New Orleans’ Hector) Romero.

There are some very, very good players that could give him a run in the preseason.”

While opposing coaches don’t like thinking of the matchup problems Marcus creates, most like having him around in the league.

“This league was really moving forward with the way everybody has recruited over the past year or so and now with his return, it just adds more credibility for the Sun Belt and what we’re doing,” Marsh said. “It’s just terrific that a name like his is returning. He will draw fans wherever they go and additional NBA interest and scouts for players throughout our league.”

“The interest Marcus brings may even help get the Sun Belt noticed as one of the better basketball conferences around,” Moser said. “This league is getting better and better from top to bottom – it’s just a matter of having one year where people begin to take notice of just what this league has.”
Marcus preparing for return

By OJ STAPLETON

The Associated Press

Western Kentucky center Chris Marcus just missed making The Associated Press' preseason All-America team.

The 7-foot-1 senior finished sixth in the voting with 31 points — one point behind Alabama's Erwin Dudley — in the poll released Tuesday.

More importantly, however, it appears Marcus may be ready to return to the practice court.

"(My foot) has been feeling good," Marcus said Tuesday. "I'm doing a lot more things on it. Hopefully, next week I'll be able to jump into some drills in practice."

Marcus missed 17 games last season with a stress fracture in his left foot, and pulled his name out of the NBA draft so he could have offseason surgery and come back to Western for one more season.

So far this season, it has been unclear just when Marcus would return.

Marcus said his doctors already have given him the green light to begin doing more strenuous activities on his foot.

"They've told me that I can pretty much start back whenever I'm comfortable and I'm ready," he said.

There is still no date set for Marcus' return. That will depend on how quickly he is able to get back into game shape once he starts practicing.

"If I'm fully healthy, it shouldn't take that long -- probably only a couple of weeks," Marcus said. "We're just going to take it one day at a time and not going to rush anything."

Last season, Marcus averaged 15.9 points and 8.9 rebounds in 15 games. In 2000-01 — the last full season Marcus played — he led the nation in rebounding with 12.1 rpg and also added 16.7 ppg.

Marcus said he was looking forward to getting to play with his teammates again and added that it was tough to watch from the sidelines as the Hilltoppers lost to the Harlem Globetrotters on Saturday.

"I think any player in my position would want to be out there helping the team, especially since those guys were so much bigger than us," Marcus said.

Western returns to action Saturday at home in an exhibition contest against the Universal All-Stars. The Hilltoppers open the regular season Nov. 23 on the road against No. 1 Arizona.

All-America team

Other members of the All-America team included Xavier's David West, Kansas' Kirk Hinrich, and Luke Walton and Jason Gardner, both of Arizona.
It's final - Marcus' career over

By OJ STAPLETON  FEB 6 2003
The Daily News

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"The Chris Marcus era officially ended at Western Kentucky on Wednesday when coach Dennis Felton announced that the 7-foot-1 center would not play again this season.

MARCUS, from 1C

to whether he had any doubts.
Since he did not really have a chance to show NBA scouts what he can do this season, there is increased pressure on Marcus to perform well in pre-draft workouts, which are usually held in May.

"There's a real desire and need for the NBA folks to know whether he's physically able to play and if he's going to be able to hold up," Felton said. "I still think there's an excellent chance that he can recover enough to show the NBA folks that he is going to be all right. But then again, who knows? There's always a mystery when you're talking about the human body.

With Marcus out of the picture, the Hilltoppers now have a better idea of what to expect in the final month of the season.

"I'm going to enjoy having closure even though it's not the way we wanted it to turn out," Felton said. "We never really knew what we were going to be able to count on and now it's going to be good to move on."

Felton said he was not sure if Marcus would come back to Bowling Green to watch his former team in the Sun Belt Tournament.

"We've talked about his medical condition and things that he needs to do to get to the professional phase of his life," Felton said. "We haven't small-talked about things like that.

Whether he comes back or not, Boyden said the Toppers would not forget what he meant to the team.

"Chris is still a part of this team. He helped make us what we are," Boyden said. "I'm going to miss seeing his big, goofy walk around campus and in the dorms and stuff. We're going to miss him a lot."
Western Kentucky's reluctant giant

Many people, I included, have harbored high hopes of Chris Marcus. Once a Dick Vitale favorite and important cog in the resurgence of Western Kentucky's once proud basketball program, Marcus suffered a painful ankle injury in the summer of 2001.

Since that injury Marcus has performed a H. Ross Perot-like on-again, off-again flirtation with basketball. Recently I wrote that Marcus had been picked up as a free agent by the Denver Nuggets to play alongside Marcus Camby, Carmello Anthony, and the rest of the Nuggets restoration project. Last week however, the door closed on that opportunity with Marcus leaving the team for the ever popular "personal reasons." Those of us who were merely fans of Marcus may never know exactly why he left the team. We may never know why a kid with boundless potential has never felt the need to put forth the effort and find the dedication to reach his potential and claim the stardom and cash that awaits him in the NBA, and that not knowing is what is so disappointing.

The puzzle seems like it's missing some pieces, but looking back at Marcus' career we may see some clues. I am not at all a psychologist, or any sort of -ologist for that matter, but if the past is any indication, Marcus is just not cut out for the limelight.

When Marcus was "discovered" by then Clemson assistant Dennis Felton he was working at a Wal-Mart in his hometown of Charlotte, North Carolina. Felton, and others, convinced Marcus to try out for his high school basketball team. So as a senior the already seven foot giant, got his first taste of organized basketball.

Marcus proved a quick study and used basketball as a catapult to Bowling Green to rekindle his relationship with Felton as a Hilltopper. Marcus was a raw player who worked hard on picking up parts of the game that were second-nature to his teammates. After his sophomore season he was projected a lottery pick if he would declare for the draft after leading the country in rebounding at more than a dozen per game.

Now, because of "personal reasons" Marcus has gone from a one-time potential lottery pick to a guy that gave up on a dream. But maybe that wasn't his dream. It was every Hilltopper fan's dream to see Marcus in the NBA bodying up Shaquille O'Neal, Michael Olawokandi, Tim Duncan, Zydrunas Ilgauskas and other NBA big men while making the kind of money that we dream of winning after we pick five numbers and a power ball.

Maybe Marcus' dream was different. Marcus' dream may have simply been to earn a worthwhile degree. If so, basketball was just his means to an end of his choosing. Maybe we'll never know why Marcus was the reluctant giant; reluctant to claim stardom; reluctant to be an NBA millionaire; reluctant to fulfill our dreams instead of his own.