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How Drexel's Camren Wynter bet on himself and came out a winner

Camren Wynter has accomplished many milestones at Drexel, but the long journey didn't feel rewarding until the Dragons earned an NCAA Tournament berth.

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Camren Wynter was named first-team All-CAA and the CAA Tournament's Most Outstanding Player this season.
YONG KIM / Staff Photographer

by Damichael Cole
Published Mar 15, 2021

Camren Wynter doesn't care.

He reached the 1,000-point mark as a sophomore. He's been named Colonial Athletic Association Rookie of the Year, first-team All-CAA and won the CAA tournament Most Outstanding Player award. But those pale in comparison to his joy of winning the CAA title.

Sure, it's often politically correct to deflect personal accomplishments and credit the team. But Wynter doesn't cherish the individual awards.

This isn't something he learned or was taught over time. It's how he's always been. His parents recall him being one of the best players on his team as a 10-year old in Hempstead, N.Y. They wanted him to shoot the ball more. Instead, Wynter would come home and brag about passes he made to teammates and winning games.

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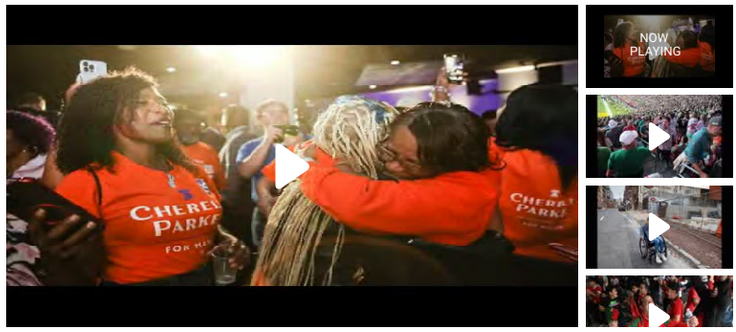

"I could never get him to shoot," Wynter's father, Maurice, said. "He just wants to come down and pass. I'm like what's with all the passing? You're not [Rajon] Rondo. He'd just look at me and say, 'But we won.'"

"I think deep down inside that he knows that it's all a blessing," Wynter's mother, Gloria, said. "He just understands that he's fortunate to reach that stage and he can't take all that glory himself."

Wynter often took the train with his parents from Long Island to the city, where there was better competition. He played AAU ball with the Riverside Hawks in Harlem. His mother said he first picked up a basketball at two years old and stopped playing soccer to focus on the hardwood.

When Wynter got to the 10th grade, however, he needed to refocus. Other hobbies became distractions, he took midday naps and hadn't worked out in a couple of days, so his father sat down and had a talk with him.

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"After that, he saw himself getting better and when you start to see yourself getting better, you're going to go a little bit harder," Maurice said.

"I feel like I didn't really know how to work at it until a certain time in my career," Wynter said.

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That talk was a breaking point. Wynter's work ethic improved and by the time he was in the 12th grade, his parents knew he was a D-1 caliber basketball player.

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The problem was that colleges didn't think so. Despite living in Hempstead, a town in Long Island that is approximately 30 miles east of New York City, he had no offers. Not from Marist, St. John's, Stony Brook, Fordham or Iona. Not even from Hofstra, which is five minutes from his home and where he grew up going to summer camps every year.

Wynter's father felt that Cam should consider D-2 ball. Wynter responded strongly by saying he believes he's a D-1 player.

"For some reason, Long Island ballplayers aren't getting those high and mid-D-1 looks," Maurice said. "He had that confidence in himself."

Wynter bet on himself and accepted a post-grad year at DME Sports Academy in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. He averaged 14.3 points and 6.1 assists.

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Then, an offer came from Drexel. Wagner and a couple of other schools reached out, but it was too late.

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"I felt comfortable with Drexel, and I didn't want to mess around," Wynter said. "They took a chance on me, and that's all I needed. I didn't need a perfect spot."

Scoring or passing wasn't what got Wynter on the court. It was his defense. An injury to starting guard Kurk Lee opened a door that hasn't been closed yet. A freshman season that was supposed to be spent on the bench turned into a CAA Rookie of the Year season.

Drexel guard Cam Wynter leads the Dragons into the NCAA Tournament while averaging 16.8 points per game.
TIM TAI / Staff Photographer

As good as his freshman season was, there were glaring holes in his game. Wynter shot 33% from three and made less than one per game. The coaches knew that schools would eventually take advantage.

Assistant coach and chief of staff Rob O'Driscoll had a talk with Wynter. His shooting had to improve. O'Driscoll and Wynter spent about a month together redefining Wynter's jumper. Hand placement and release points were emphasized. They started with 10-foot jumpers and gradually worked back to the three-point line.

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Fast forward to his junior season, Wynter is shooting 42.5% from three while averaging 16.8 points per game.

"We totally reconstructed his shot," O'Driscoll said. "I basically moved it from a long rotating shot where he rolled his hand and had it above his head, to a nice and more compact shot where there's not a lot of movement in it."

"It's a credit to him. I could tweak a couple things, but he's the guy who put in the work."

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The individual work that Wynter puts in is all centered on achieving the team's goal. When Drexel practiced at 3:30 p.m., he'd get to the gym at 10 a.m., get shots up, grab something to eat, then come back. When practices moved to 9:15 a.m., he got there around 8 a.m.

"I realized that winning is not easy," Wynter said. "That it was going to take more. I was just consistent with putting work in early every day this year.

"Basketball is like my safe place. If I'm feeling some type of way, I just go in the gym, get on the gun and just shoot."

When he walked into the Daskalakis Athletic Center for those practices, Wynter would stare into the rafters, with his eyes set on the CAA banner. His goal was putting a Drexel one beside it.

Now he's leading Drexel to the NCAA Tournament for the first time since before he was born. It makes those long train rides feel worth it for his parents. The long workouts are paying off for himself and his team. It's the way he prefers it to be.

"His whole thing is becoming the best teammate he can be and helping his team win, and in order for him to do that, he's got to become the most complete player he can be," O'Driscoll said.

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Published March 15, 2021

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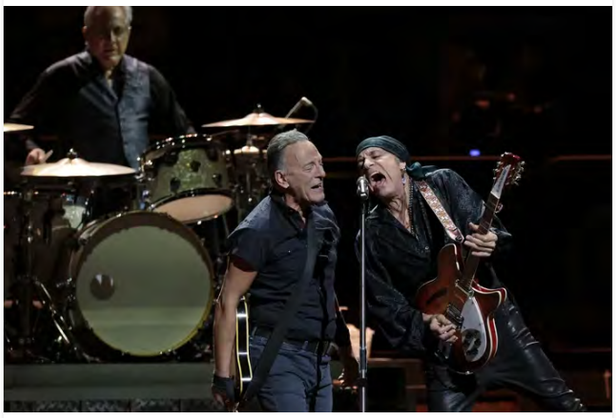

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