



11:35 p.m.



3:11 a.m.



4:03 a.m.



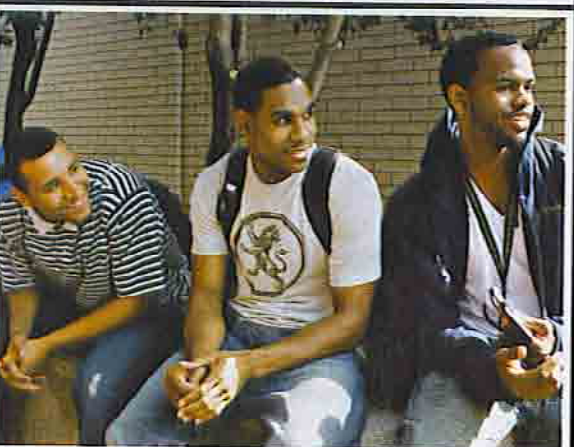
9:13 a.m.



9:37 a.m.



10:01 a.m.



12:10 p.m.



1:38 p.m.



4:15 p.m.



6:10 p.m.



7 p.m.



7:17 p.m.



NEITHER RAIN, NOR SLEET, NOR A 2-3 ZONE

Stop DANA JOHN? How about trying to get him to take a nap. Whatever the day, whatever the time, his eyes are wide-open as he juggles hoops, fatherhood and the graveyard shift

BY SAM APPLE | PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALEX TEHRANI

9:30 A.M.

Dana John should be tired. Until an hour ago, and since midnight, he'd been outside in a 30° chill, hauling 70-pound sacks and packed crates onto shipping containers outside the U.S. Post Office at Newark International Airport. As he worked, a continuous stream of planes descended to the tarmac, roaring beams of light appearing suddenly out of the night sky. It would have been a breathtaking spectacle if John could only take the time to sit back and gaze upward. He cannot. Sack after sack, crate after crate, all night long, five times a week, he toils on.

John is home now, showered, freshly clothed, looking wide-awake. There's no slouch in his shoulders, no circles under his eyes. In fact, as he sits on his bed in his Elizabeth, N.J., apartment, he brushes off any notion of sleep. "I worked real fast and sneaked some rest between 2:30 and 3:30 this morning," he explains, as if a nap a day is all a person needs.

In any case, it's not what John does after sundown that distinguishes him. When he's not moving mail, he carries a full course load at New Jersey City University, raises a preschool-aged son, helps care for his severely disabled nephew—and puts up double-digit numbers as a swingman. He drinks no coffee, pops no prescription pick-me-ups. So, yeah, John should be tired.

He should be exhausted.

Good thing he's too busy to think about it.

10 A.M. (one hour of sleep, nine hours awake).

John is at his ex-girlfriend's house playing video games with their son, Dana Jr. Daedae, as John calls him, who is so excited to have his dad around to play with that he's having trouble concentrating. "You've got to go slow," John says, laughing as Daedae's video-game character falls into a fiery pit for the fifth straight time. "You can't just run all over the place like that." The advice is funny coming from a man who is always in motion. The real irony, though, is that the 26-year-old star of NJCU is playing organized basketball for the first time, because he never before had the time.

When John was 14, his family moved from a tough Brooklyn neighborhood to the Poconos. Mom Lynn was relieved to relocate her family to a more tranquil setting, but the move came with a price—a big mortgage—and the flagging resort economy of the area offered few jobs. Unable to find work locally, John's dad, Galbert, had to keep his custodial post at Public School 273 in Brooklyn, which he'd had since being laid off as a branch auditor at Citibank. Commuting between Brooklyn and his new home, often on icy winter roads, took at least two hours each way, and the sacrifice wasn't lost on his teenage son. "I saw his determination to keep the family together," John says. "It's why I always choose family over anything else."



A smooth J, honed on the streets, has John among the NJAC's scoring leaders.

Any hoop dreams seemed irrelevant in the light of day. Members of the Pocono Mountain East High team encouraged John to try out after seeing him flash his skills in pickup and PE, but he never really considered the invite. Instead, John worked at a supermarket—his mother and older brother Deshond had jobs there too—logging more than 30 hours a week at minimum wage. John's earnings went toward family bills. "I wanted to play basketball, because I love it," John says now. "But issues at home needed to be taken care of."

NOON (one hour of sleep, 11 hours awake).

John finds himself with a rare hour to relax, but almost as soon as he slides his lean, 6'2" frame

into a plastic chair in the school cafeteria, a teammate settles in to razz him about missing the game-winner a few nights earlier. John's long angular face and soft eyes are usually stoic—the face of someone who has learned to take whatever life serves him. But now that he's hanging with the guys, another side peeks through, and his smile won't go away. "At least I hit rim," he says, playfully.

John has no trouble putting the missed shot into perspective. "You can't be down," he says. "You let

the tears go, then you keep moving. There are bigger things than basketball."

He sometimes sounds so levelheaded about the relative importance of the game that it seems strange that he ever decided to play at all. But practical isn't the same as dispassionate. And even though John's first priorities have always been family and work, his desire to play continued to grow even after he left high school. He enrolled at Wilkes University for a semester before financial pressures forced him to drop out and take the mail job, but not long after starting, he joined a postal-worker league. Colleagues still wax poetic about the time John went for 50 in a big game against their rivals from the Dominick V. Daniels Processing and Distribution Center. And when he played on a summer rec circuit, he realized for certain that

So Brown left John alone, but not before he and Collins planted the seed. Daedae was going to be old enough for day care in a year. And John did want a college degree. Sure, it would be weird to be a 25-year-old freshman, but he wouldn't be the only one in D3.

In the fall of 2005, he took the plunge. But he wasn't about to give up his job or his responsibilities, so something else had to go. And John figured that something might as well be sleep.

"YOU SEE WHAT HE DOES AND IT KIND OF LIFTS YOUR SPIRITS. HE'S THE DEFINITION OF A MAN."



When he first joined the Knights, John didn't even know how to run a layup drill.

he could hang with college-level competition.

Still, John had no plans to play until best friend Kareem Collins showed him off. Collins played for NJCU in 2003-04, and John tagged along to off-season open scrimmages. It wasn't long before head coach Charles Brown noticed the new guy who was shooting lights out against his starters. Brown asked Collins about his pal, and Collins gave his coach the bad news: John was otherwise engaged, working at night and caring for his son during the day.

1 P.M. (one hour of sleep, 12 hours awake).

John takes a seat in the back of his Civilizations class and drops his books onto the desk. Before beginning the lecture, his professor tells the students they'd better withdraw now, before the midterm, if they anticipate a lot of absences. The speech seems directed at John. Earlier in the semester, Daedae had begun to act up at day care, and John missed a number of classes to take care of him.

After all the class members promise consistent attendance, the professor opens the floor to questions about the previous night's assignment. He answers them in a Ben-Stein-in-Ferris Bueller's Day Off monotone that would put even the best-rested

student to sleep. Sure enough, foreheads drift downward until they're planted on desks. But John is alert and taking notes. He'll be the first to confess to dozing off now and again, but he's also working hard to keep his grades up. He enrolled at NJCU thinking he'd major in business management, but has since changed his mind. His new focus is special education, which he hopes to go into after graduating.

John already knows about helping children

with disabilities. His sister, Desiree, has a 15-year-old son with cerebral palsy. Denair can't walk or talk, and he eats through a feeding tube. On weekends and whenever else he has a chance, John gives his sister and mother—who went to school to become a nurse so she could care for her grandson—a break from the draining job of watching Denair. While Daedae plays nearby, John adjusts Denair's body in his bed, monitors the oxygen machine and suctions his trachea. "You see what he does, and it kind of lifts your spirits," says teammate Alex Mirabel of John. "He's the definition of a man."

3:15 P.M. (one hour of sleep; 14 hours 15 minutes awake).

After spending a half hour scouting tonight's foe, Fairleigh Dickinson-Florham, on the Internet, John heads to the basement of the NJCU gym and throws his uniform into the washing machine. Because it's a gameday, the Gothic Knights don't have the usual 4 p.m. practice, and this would be a good time for John to crawl onto one of the trainer's tables for a nap. On days like this, John often takes advantage of the downtime to catch some shut-eye as NJCU student-athletes have their ankles taped and hamstrings stretched next to him. Compared with his old napping spot, the locker room floor, and the bench he rests on during post-office breaks, the cushioned table is a bed at the Ritz-Carlton.

But today, John won't get any rest. Instead, he spends the next two hours in the weight room, helping players on the women's team with their workouts. It's clear he's popular with the ladies.

John didn't plan to be a father, not yet anyway. But when his girlfriend, Nikeerah, became pregnant, he wanted to marry her. When they weren't able to make things work, John grew depressed. The ultimate family man couldn't keep his own family together, and he felt like a failure.

Today, the two split care for Daedae, and by

channeling his energy into basketball, Daedae and Denair, John has moved beyond his disappointment. But while he's single and would like to meet someone, being in school has put him face-to-face with a frustrating paradox: Surrounded by cute, eligible coeds, he has absolutely no time to date any of them.

5:15 P.M. (one hour of sleep; 16 hours 15 minutes awake).

John should be tired, but he's not. As the Gothic Knights go through their pregame shootaround, he looks even more energetic than he has all day. He feeds alley-oops to his teammates and throws down a few monster dunks for the modest crowd of 100. Stepping behind the arc, he drains five straight threes. Such ease makes it hard to believe his

game until he could barely breathe. John's doctors diagnosed a rare exertion allergy, and now he has to take Benadryl to counteract it.

A side effect of Benadryl is drowsiness.

7 P.M. (one hour of sleep, 18 hours awake).

NJCU staffers call the Gothic Knights star Superman for obvious reasons. Brown says he has no doubt John could have played D1 ball had he begun the game in high school. But really, the modesty of the D3 experience seems the right fit for John. In this pond, he is by far the biggest fish. In D1, he'd be fighting for PT each night.

Tonight, against FDU-Florham, NJCU jumps to a 7-0 lead after John's first three-pointer. It's quickly obvious, again, who the best player

on the floor is; no one else is even close. But Coach Brown doesn't run the offense through John, so John spends a good part of the game lurking beyond the arc, where he can shoot all he wants without having to share the ball. His quick release allows him to get clean looks with a man in his face—which is just the way it's been since his rep spread around the conference. John opens the second half with two threes in the first 27 seconds, then hits another at the 17:19 mark to blow the game open. He finishes with 25 points.

10 P.M. (one hour of sleep, 21 hours awake).

With only two hours until his shift begins, John decides there's not enough time to go home. He drives

straight from campus to the post office and pulls into the parking lot. Daedae's first shoes—Air Jordans—dangle from his rearview.

He will soon be back in the cold New Jersey air, lugging bags of mail, but now he sits in his car and closes his eyes.

Dana John should be tired and, finally, he is.

12 A.M. (three hours of sleep, 21 hours awake).

The cafeteria at the U.S. Post Office at Newark International Airport isn't an inspiring place. The small, dimly lit room is lined with humming vending machines and notices about workplace safety. John is sitting quietly at a table. It's peaceful, but not for long. A voice comes over the loudspeaker to announce the arrival of a truckload of mail.

Time to stop loafing and get to work.

Is there a more tireless man in sports than Dana John? E-mail us at post@espnmag.com.



With no scholarships in D3, John must work full-time to pay for school and support Daedae.

transition to the college game wasn't smooth.

"I called for weakside help, and he looked at me like I was crazy," Brown says, recalling John's first months with the team. "Defensively, he had no clue." Adjusting to the offense wasn't much easier. They don't call charging fouls on the playground, and John was racking them up on the court. Plus, he'd never had to learn plays before.

6:45 P.M. (one hour of sleep; 17 hours 45 minutes awake).

Fifteen minutes to tip-off, John listens patiently to Coach Brown's pep talk. When Coach is finished, John—who hasn't slept all day or night—pops two Benadryl tablets. On doctor's orders. When John was 15, his face and throat swelled after a pickup