

CHI Q&A, DANA JOHN

NJCU's captain, leading scorer, and "big brother" does it all with a humility and quiet strength that has helped guide the Gothic Knights out of the basketball wilderness.



The story of one Dana John is an almost-mythical tale that most seasoned observers of the NYC college hoops scene already know by heart. *Never played organized basketball until two years ago. 26-year old freshman last year. Led his team in scoring en route to being named to the ECAC Division III first team. Father of a young son. Uncle and caretaker of a handicapped nephew. Full class load while working the midnight-to-8 a.m. shift at the Post Office.* But while the media seized on John's story as a feel-good, human interest piece, the man at the center of the attention continued to go about his life in the humble, hard-working fashion he'd always known. Nothing had changed on the inside, even as everything else changed on the outside.

CHI sat down with Dana John before the season and asked him about the newfound attention, the responsibility to his teammates and coaches and, of course, his love for the game. After speaking with John, CHI spoke to his current and former coaches, the father-son combo of Marc and Charles Brown.

CHI: Did it feel like a rollercoaster of emotions last year?

John: Yeah, definitely, because it's like I came into the program really humble, and I'm still humble and hungry to improve at every aspect of the game, and it just opened my eyes that there are ways in any division, Division I, II, or III, where somebody can excel at any sport and help their team out, help their athletic program out.

CHI: How did your family react to everything?

John: My father, he was real thrilled by it because he loves basketball, he loves the Knicks and he likes the fact to see me do well at a sport I always loved to play and always wanted to play. He was real happy with it.

CHI: Through your talent on the court and obviously, because of your personality, you became a team leader last year. How have you taken that responsibility and taken it up a level this year?

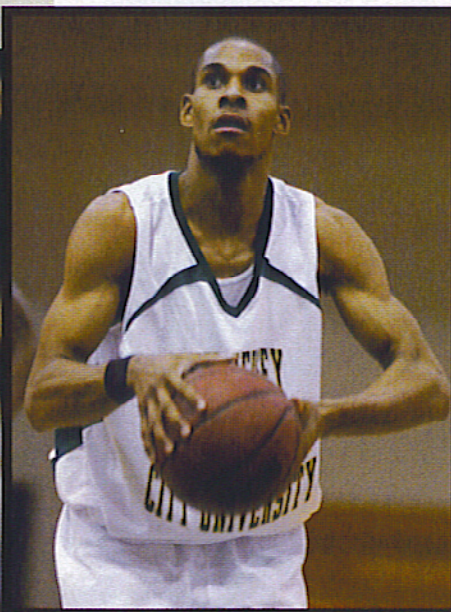
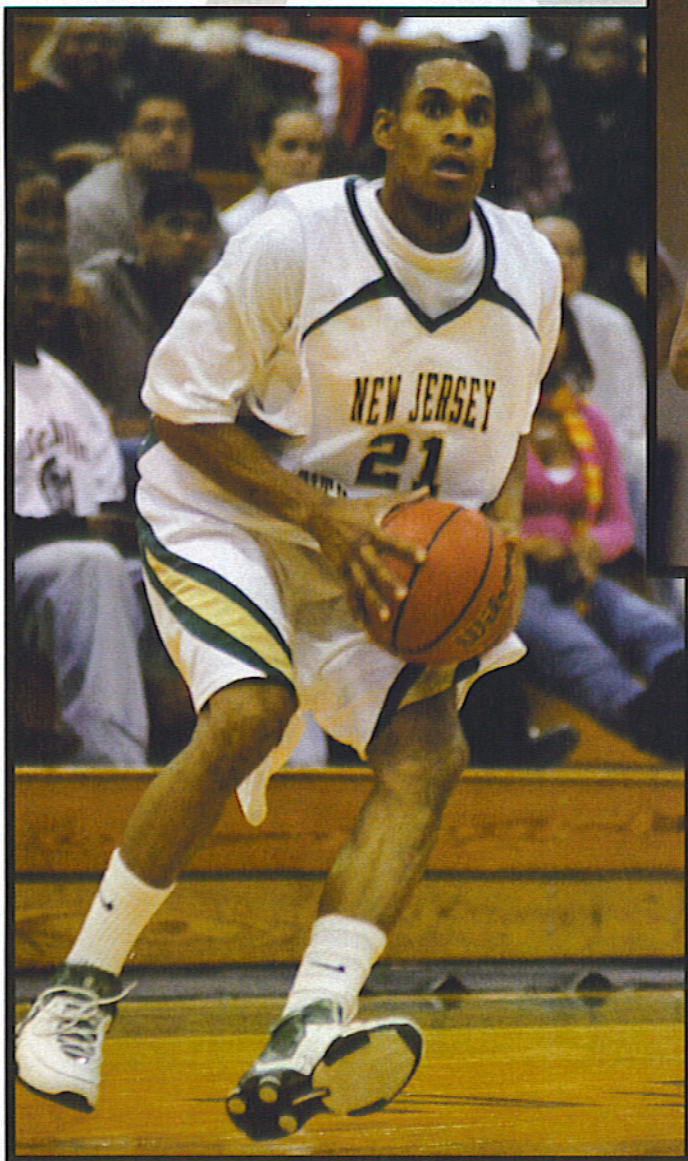
John: Being named captain this year, I definitely took it up another notch and I also took it up past the level of basketball and brought it into real life with the younger kids. I have a lot of age over them and I'm able to help them off the court and let them know that classes are still always more important than basketball, and getting their life and priorities straight.

CHI: How do you help mentor the younger players besides telling them class is important? Do you help them in their personal lives with maybe some issues that they're facing for the first time that you maybe faced already?

John: Well, when you have issues for financial reasons, I try to get them on track and let them know financial issues, like with their credit. Little things that my father instilled in me and that Coach Brown instilled in us. I try to instill [that] in them, like during locker room talk or after we work out or while we work out, just have conversations on life and being a man in general.

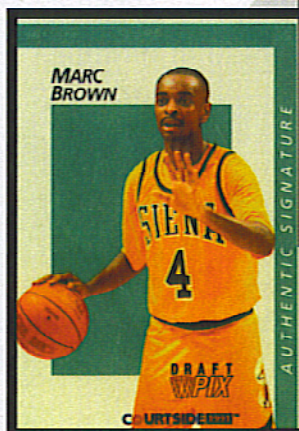
CHI: You guys were one shot away from the NCAA Tournament last year. What do you think your team's strengths are this year and can you improve on your season last year?

John: Our team strengths this year are returning several players that are key to the offense this year, like Aaron Desir and Bruce Rice, and certain players improved on their game, and we have Kevin Tucker and Marques Hill returning, and with the help of Coach Brown's son [Chris], who's talent is amazing and his help with the offense and his help with coach Brown's system should help us out a lot.



my nephew is doing a lot better now and I still go up on weekends and help out my family and take care of him sometimes, so everything is going pretty good.

CHI: Since Dana's a few years older than the rest of the team, what kind of leadership qualities does he bring not only to the younger guys on the team? Dana talked a lot about how his story has helped bring in a few other athletes to the university. Can you give me a feel for what kind of leader he is?



Coach Marc Brown:

He's a natural leader. He's a little more mature than an 18-year-old or a 19-year-old that

would be coming in going to school. I think for him, it's nothing he really works on, it's a natural thing. When you meet him he's an intelligent young man and he's driven. Obviously if you look at what he's done so far, you see the drive, so he leads by example, but

he's also a vocal guy too, so that definitely helps. He's a team captain this year and obviously, as a junior, that means his senior year he'll be a team captain again next year. It was a no-brainer to make him team captain. He probably could have been team captain last year to be honest with you.

CHI: Personally, what are your goals?

John: My goals for myself, like I said I want to win the championship for myself and for the team and of course everyone's goals to get All-American or certain awards and accolades like that. So that's all really.

CHI: Your whole story has been told and now that you've had some success at the college level, I know the season at hand is more important, but are you looking down the road to maybe having a chance at playing pro ball here or overseas?

John: Oh, definitely. If I get an offer to play after I finish here in college, I'll definitely accept it, because it's also an experience to see a different culture and [maybe] a different country, so I'll definitely accept it.

CHI: How is your family doing? Are your son and nephew doing well?

John: My son is doing real well. They say he's one of the smartest kids in the class, he complains about going to school all the time, and

CHI: What do you think about Dana's personality makes him not only a special player, but also a special person?

Coach Charles Brown:

Well, he's a giving young man. He works, so he has a little money some of the other guys don't have, and he has a little car and stuff like that, but he goes out of his way to help the other guys, to pick them up and so forth. He just has a great personality, he's really outgoing, he speaks to everyone and he's a great friend too.

