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Student intern vital part of Pistons championship team

By **Marcus Popiolek**, contributing writer

As the **Detroit Pistons** pursue an NBA championship, one Oakland University student is living his dream of being part of a professional basketball team.

When Ryan Hoover was asked if he wanted to intern with the Pistons, he thought the opportunity would be fun, but he never imagined he would play such a vital role in the team's success.

"I figured I would be some sort of gopher, you know like getting water and stuff. But when they told me they wanted me to help break down film and work on other aspects of scouting teams and players, I was blown away," said Hoover, a former OU basketball player. "I'm living a dream. This has been the most amazing time of my life. I'm truly blessed."

Hoover may feel blessed now, but there was a time when things were not going his way.

The Harrison Township native came to OU four years ago on a basketball scholarship after being pursued by several Division I teams. The first two years he played a vital role off the bench and, like many college players, was poised to take the next step in his playing career at the outset of his junior year.

"It was my time," he said. "The starters graduated, and I was ready to take the next step. Unfortunately, my knee wasn't ready."

Before his junior season, Hoover injured his knee and, in an effort to continue his season, he played on the damaged leg. Eventually, the pain and lack of mobility was too much for him, so he underwent knee surgery. Understanding this type of injury was something he couldn't overcome in a short period of time, Hoover and OU coach Greg Kampe decided his collegiate playing days were behind him.

"Even though I couldn't play anymore, Kampe was always there for me. He worked with me to keep my scholarship and was great at keeping me involved with the team," said Hoover, who accepted a role as student assistant coach with the team.

In his new role, Hoover kept teammates upbeat, encouraged them, and when possible, practiced with the team. It was during this time that Kampe received a phone call that would turn into the opportunity of a lifetime for Hoover.

"When he first told me, I thought he was joking," Hoover said. "It was early in the morning, and I really wasn't focusing on what he was saying. But when I realized it wasn't a joke, I was surprised and excited. I mean, how many people get this type of opportunity."

The opportunity didn't stop when Hoover agreed to be the team's intern. While some interns are running around offices fetching things, Hoover is sitting with Pistons assistant coach Pat Sullivan and analyzing game tape. He also is in charge of providing game tape of individual players and analyzing their tendencies.

"I provide players with (opposing player) game tapes so they know what to expect. Does so and so like to go left off the dribble, or does he prefer to go right, things like that can make a difference in the outcome of a game," said Hoover, who has worked with the team since the season began in October. "It didn't start that way, but every week my responsibilities grow, and now I'm really part of the team."

Hoover's work takes him late into the evening, and when that happens, he ends up spending the night with the coaches. And, for someone who hopes to make coaching his career one day, what better group of individuals to learn from.

“Coach Larry Brown and his staff are amazing. They have so much knowledge and have taught me so much in such a short period of time,” Hoover said. “I have to pinch myself as a reminder of how lucky I have it. They have really taken me under their wings. Coach Sullivan is like a brother to me.”

The family atmosphere Hoover experiences with the coaches, doesn't end there. Many Pistons players have worked with Hoover, and he has become an everyday part of their lives as well. Recently, Hoover traveled with the team during their Eastern Conference playoff run. For Hoover, there is no bigger highlight.

“To travel with the team, work with the players and coaches, and be a part of this playoff run, what more could a person ask for,” he said.

The Pistons play the Los Angeles Lakers in the NBA finals, which begin Sunday, June 6, in Los Angeles, Calif. Hoover will be traveling with the team during the finals, but you won't find him sitting on the sidelines during the games, he will be in the team's video room analyzing game tape as it happens. While Pistons fans root for a victory, Hoover and other coaches will review game tape to devise ways of overcoming the Lakers defense while coming up with defensive strategies to stop Kobe, Shaq and the Lakers other soon to be hall of famers.

Hoover, a communications major, currently is completing his last class toward his undergraduate degree. He doesn't know what the future will hold, but the experience he has gained with the Pistons will remain with him forever.

“I would love to continue my job with the Pistons, but if that doesn't happen, then it wasn't meant to be,” he said. “What I do know is that I want to be a part of basketball. Pros, college or whatever, basketball is where I want to be, and this experience, working with such a class organization as the Pistons, can only help me with my future.”

For more information on the Pistons and their championship run, visit the [Detroit Pistons](#) Web site.

SUMMARY

As the Detroit Pistons pursue an NBA championship, one Oakland University student is living his dream of being part of a professional basketball team. When former OU basketball player Ryan Hoover was asked if he wanted to intern with the Pistons, he thought the opportunity would be fun, but he never imagined he would play such a vital role in the team's success.

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