



sports



Local product gets his shot

Joey Zahn: making the most of his opportunity

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Janet Champ once wrote, ‘All your life you are told the things you cannot do. All your life they will say you’re not good enough or strong enough or talented enough. They will say you’re the wrong height or the wrong type to play this or be this or achieve this. They will tell you no. A thousand times no. Until all the no’s become meaningless. All your life they will tell you no, quite firmly and very quickly. And you will tell them yes.’

The idea of proving people wrong is one thing, but showing those that doubted you, they are wrong is a whole other idea.

Success is a lot more than proving people wrong, it is about finding happiness in the thing you are doing.

For Joey Zahn, the choice to prove his doubters wrong has helped his love for the game of basketball grow.

The 2016 Lexington High School graduate has a love of the game that stems from his childhood.

“Ever since I was young my dad has been my coach pretty much,” Zahn said. “Growing up I was interested in all sports but basketball was just an instant love, it was what I loved to do, what my dad loved to coach me in. I’ve always loved the game, even watching it, my love for the game is what interested me in it.”

Growing up, Zahn would have his friends come over and play three-on-three in his driveway. Basketball, however, was not the only sport he had played throughout his time as a Minutemen.

He was also apart of his high school’s golf team.

During his time on the golf team, Zahn earned four varsity letters, a 2013 Ohio Cardinal Conference Championship first team mention, 2014 OCC Champ. second team mention and a 2014 OCC honorable mention.

The decision to stop playing golf came easily.

“I wasn’t very good at golf and I always loved basketball,” Zahn said. “I was not going to play it or continue because I didn’t want

too.”

While at Lexington, Zahn set the record for most career 3-point field goals, highest career free-throw percentage and most career free throws made.

During his senior year he averaged 16 points per game, five assists and four rebounds.

He also set the school single-game standard for assists with 13 and scored 1,057 career points. Zahn was also named as the OCC Player of the Year, All-Ohio second team pick and led Lexington to a conference title and a berth in Division II Sweet 16 but fell to Ottawa-Glandorf in the regional semifinals.

After so much success in high school, the view point and next target was much bigger.

He was onto college basketball but with limited options and most of those stemming from his height.

“I’m 5’ 10” and like 160 pounds, not very athletic and not a lot of people thought I could play Division II basketball,” Zahn said. “I could have gone D-III but you can’t get a lot of scholarships for D-III either but I wanted to come and play D-II basketball just to prove to people that I could and to prove to my family that I could.”

The decision to come to Ashland was simple, it was local and it went along with wanting to be able to prove himself to his family.

“Ashland is the only D-II school that recruited me at all,” Zahn said. “I didn’t get calls from anybody else. I got a lot of calls for D-III but Ellenwood was the only one that came to my games from D-II and the only guy that took a chance on me. It is also local, which is really nice but I am lucky he gave me a chance and that I’m proving to him that I can play.”

Head coach John Ellenwood’s reasoning for recruiting Zahn was due to him being an high IQ player and reminding him of a player from Marquette University who played hard and tough.

“He is a tough young man,” Ellenwood said. “It is obvious when you see him that he is not the biggest player in the world but he reminded me of a young man from Marquette a few years ago named,

Travis Diener and he took his team to the Final Four and he was very little but he was tough as nails and made things happen. He is one of those guys that is a high IQ player and you need high IQ players, he is very skilled in terms of shooting and passing, you need that and he is tough and you need that as well. He is also a very good teammate to the guys that are around him and he cares about his team and he is not scared to take on a challenge and you need that to be successful. I saw all those traits in him early on.”

Upon arriving at AU, Zahn was amongst some of the best players the program has seen, Adrian Cook and Boo Osbourne.

The diversity and depth on the team gave the Education major a chance to learn from his teammates and take a redshirt year. The decision came ultimately after realizing he was behind Cook as the team’s starting point guard. That year gave him time to get better and understand the fast pace of Division II college basketball.

“I learned a lot, the college game takes a lot to plan and everything is faster and it is more like a job,” Zahn said. “I still enjoy playing a lot but day to day it is tough. You have to learn how to manage your time and get a lot of sleep, you can’t not be healthy and you have to stay on top of it and do all the right things. I basically learned all that from Adrian and Boo, they taught me a lot.”

That year, the Eagles went 19-10 overall and 12-8 in the GLIAC. The team made a run in the GLIAC Tournament and made it all the way to the GLIAC Championship where they lost in a close 80-79 match against Ferris State.

This season, Zahn and the rest of the team are sitting at a 16-8 overall record and a GLIAC record of 9-7. Zahn is averaging 4.5 points per game, 16 assists, 100 percent free throw percentage and three steals.

At the start of this season, some unpredicted circumstances arose causing a lack of depth in the team and on the bench from multiple player injuries.

One thing on all of the team’s

mind was Zahn’s ability to cover the floor and his height matchup against other team’s players.

“He has stepped in, in terms of spreading the floor,” Ellenwood said. “When we lost Nick and Jay to injury, we needed a guy who could space the floor and also be a ball mover and he knows how to do both those things really well. He knows how to shoot the ball and he knows how to pass it to the right guys and that is what he needed out of him more than anything when those guys went down.”

Zahn’s biggest game of the season came on Dec. 9 in a GLIAC matchup against Davenport at home. He added a career high 21 points, 2 rebounds and went 7-for-9 from the three point line. Zahn was named the Donley Ford Player of the Game after the 86-65 win.

“Before that game I hadn’t really got into the flow that much, I had been playing but I hadn’t been shooting the ball that great before that game and I knew I could,” Zahn said. “I had been playing a lot in practice but before those games, teams weren’t really focusing on me that much. I might not have been on the scouting report but I got open a lot and my teammates found me and I was knocking down shots so I keep shooting. Since that game teams have been blanking me a lot more which makes it difficult now.”

Before his memorable Davenport game, Zahn was just looking to get his shot on the court and play to his best ability as much as he could.

“I knew I was going to get my shot to play no matter what happened, but I didn’t think I would be playing this much,” Zahn said. “I got my chance early on because we had a couple injuries, such as Nick [Bapst] and he plays a 2 and that’s what I play. I do play point guard sometimes, but with him going out, someone had to step in and with [Jay] Sloan going out, there was just a void on the team and I had to come in and I knew it was my time to play and I try to play good.”

From his experiences, Zahn has learned to focus on him and his confidence levels when entering into the game. He said before games he also tries to concentrate

THE WEEK AHEAD

Women’s Basketball

Feb. 16 @ Purdue NW

Feb. 22 vs. Saginaw Valley

Feb. 24 vs. Northwood

Men’s Basketball

Feb. 16 @ Purdue NW

Feb. 22 vs. Saginaw Valley

Feb. 24 vs. Northwood

Swimming & Diving

Feb. 16- 17 @ GLIAC Championship

Feb. 24 @ Last Chance Meet

Wrestling

Feb. 23-24 vs. Super Region II

Track & Field

Feb. 16 @ Buckeye Tune Up

Feb. 24 -25 @ GLIAC Championship

Softball

Feb. 23 @ Lewis

Feb. 24 @Lindenwood

Baseball

Feb. 24 @ Bellarmine

on what the other teams are going to do and during the games he does not back down from anyone, no matter the size difference.

“During the games I play with a lot of confidence and I don’t back down from anybody,” Zahn said. “If you ask Marsalis or Wendell, or any of our seniors, there have been a couple times where kids have really tired to get into me and they have my back all the time and I don’t back down from anybody during the games. That is another thing you have to have when you’re not that big.”

The team has about four games left on the regular season before tournament play begins and the only thing on Zahn’s mind, as well as the rest of the team, is doing his part to make it there.

“My goals are to just to do my and play my role really well,” Zahn said. “Our goal as a team is to get it to the NCAA tournament but we gotta win. For me it is just contributing and getting my teammates the ball and to make sure I’m producing.”

Zahn has worked hard to show that no matter his size, he is here to play. You do not have to be a 6-foot tall guy to play basketball but you do have to have the drive and love of the game that drives the passion and motivation behind it. He fits all those characteristics and reflects that he is not one to back down from a game just because of his size of the size of the player he is defending. Instead, he uses his size and height to an unforeseen advantage and that is his toughness.

Zahn and the rest of the men’s basketball team will be back in action (Feb. 17) in a road game against Purdue Northwest before playing the two final games of the regular season at home.

Tip off is scheduled for 4 p.m.