

BASKETBALL

Who's the tallest player in Division I basketball? This 7-foot-5 Kentucky native

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Jamarion Sharp's dad is 6-foot-9 and his mom is 6-foot-3.

The way he views it, "I didn't have no choice but to be 7'5," he says with a laugh.

The Western Kentucky center easily catches everyone's attention at 7-foot-5, 237-pounds with a 7-foot-7 wingspan and a size 18 shoe, but the son of Mario Sharp and Shiby Watkins has an even bigger personality and heart for people.

"God blessed me that he put Jamarion in my life and my family's life," said Jamarion's former Hopkinsville coach and current Male coach Tim Haworth.

"Outside of basketball, he hangs out with my kids, my wife and I'm so proud of what he's accomplished. Couldn't ask for a better kid on and off the court."

The Hopkinsville native was an all-district and Kentucky All-Star for Haworth. He played in the KHSAA Sweet 16 state tournament his sophomore year.

It was in high school where his body started to really grow. Already 6-foot-6 by the time he started high school, he would eventually jump past 7 feet by the end of his four years of school.

WKU coach Rick Stansbury was recruiting another kid one night, and the opposing team was playing Hopkinsville. That's when Sharp first caught the coach's eye.

"I saw him warm up in a warmup line and it was intriguing," Stansbury said. "The first half he didn't play. I went over to coach Haworth and asked, 'How about the big boy?' The coach said he's going to be really good. I said, 'Coach, why don't he play?'"

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Haworth decided to show Stansbury what Sharp is capable of doing and it was enough to impress the Hilltopper coach.

"I worked him out at halftime during the game for three or four minutes in my suit and tie and Stansbury said, 'I'm going to offer him (a scholarship) after the game,'" Haworth recalled. "A lot of my coaching buddies laughed because they wondered if he was that good and I said, 'No, but he's going to be that good.'"

Sharp considered Western Kentucky a dream school and told Stansbury then he would go to Bowling Green to play, but didn't fill the education requirements out of high school and played two seasons on the junior college level at John A. Logan College in Illinois.

He played alongside former Trinity star and one-time Louisville signee Jay Scrubb. His final season there, he was considered a four-star prospect and the top junior-college player in the nation by 247Sports.

Sharp said he had offers from the likes of Oregon, Baylor, Louisville, West Virginia, South Carolina, San Diego State and others, but stuck with Stansbury's program.

"This was where my heart was at from the beginning," Sharp said. "It means a lot to me. The people that didn't get to see me (play) at my old school will now get to see me play here."

According to the John A. Logan website, his height was listed at 7-foot-3, but when he arrived on campus at WKU, he was measured at two inches taller at 7-foot-5.

He's the tallest player in program history, even taller than the late-great Chris Marcus who stood at 7-foot-1. Also, the tallest player in Division I basketball at the time.

Sharp hopes to add more than just a big presence to the Hilltopper basketball team this upcoming season, and he's impressed his coaches early.

"He's been a more pleasant surprise than what we were hoping for," Stansbury said. "I really like what he was in high school and junior college, but love what he can be. He came in doing some other things better than what I anticipated.

"He's got a high ceiling."

College basketball: Games in Kentucky may approach pre-COVID attendance despite varying restrictions

As Sharp continues to adjust to the Division I level of the game by adding strength and weight – now just three pounds away from his goal of 240 pounds – by eating 5,000 calories a day, he’s also getting used to the tempo.

“Getting up and down the court,” he said has been the biggest adjustment early. “This court is bigger than a junior college court. It takes a little more to get up the floor and I’m really working to get better at that.”

He has three years to play for the Hilltoppers and his current and former coaches believe his potential as a basketball player stands higher than his stature.

Haworth feels, “He’s going to be a pro and I said it back then.”

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