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## Former Colony High standout helps Caltech break 26-year losing streak

By Ashley Zeldin

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Former Colony High standout athlete Collin Murphy has become a valued member of the California Institute of Technology basketball team. (Photo courtesy of California Institute of Technology sports information)

PASADENA, Calif. — Box scores don't do Collin Murphy justice. The California Institute of Technology basketball team's sophomore co-captain had just 32 points and 51 rebounds in 25 games this season.

Murphy's contributions to one of the nation's losingest basketball teams are more intangible: hustle and leadership.

Recently, the Wasilla native helped the Pasadena, Calif., institute overcome a Southern California Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (SCIAC) losing streak spanning 310 games over 26 years.

The Beavers' 46-45 home win over Occidental — the final game of the season — was a fitting end to their 5-20 season.

“I feel like it’s a stepping block for next year, because once you get through the first one, more follow,” said Murphy, whose stat line for the game included three rebounds — two offensive — and a steal. “After we got that first win (against American Sports University), our confidence just skyrocketed. We avenged an earlier loss to (UC) Santa Cruz that had beaten half the SCIAC teams, and we thought we really can play with anyone in our league.”

But 13 games into conference play, despite solid efforts, the Beavers were still winless.

Going into the last conference game against Oxy, Murphy rallied his team to win for senior co-captain Ryan Elmquist, who he considers a mentor.

“We knew how much he wanted it for his last game, so everyone really started getting after it,” Murphy said.

Down by eight with three minutes left, Caltech locked down on defense and tied the game. Elmquist was fouled with three seconds left and made 1 of 2 from the line. Oxy’s final shot drifted right.

“I couldn’t believe it finally happened,” Murphy said of breaking the streak, which dates to Jan. 23, 1985, five years before the 20-year-old was born. “The whole crowd (all 387 of them) came out onto the court. It was surreal.”

Murphy’s positive attitude and work ethic were no more evident than when he lost his spot in the starting lineup in December.

“I’d be lying if I didn’t say there was a tiny part of me that was wondering why I wasn’t playing football instead,” said Murphy, who made all-state on both sides of the gridiron as a quarterback and defensive back out of Colony High School and had planned to play in the Ivy League. The three-sport athlete also earned all-region honors in soccer. “It made me think for a second, ‘I’m not really a basketball player,’ but I love basketball. I’m not one to mope so I said to myself, ‘Stop feeling sorry for yourself and get going.’”

Murphy, never a prolific scorer, couldn’t shoot his way back into the starting lineup. So he did what he does best.

“I recommitted myself,” Murphy said. “I just put it in my mind that I was going to get every single rebound that I could. If I was guarding someone, I wasn’t just going to shut them down; I was going to take the ball from them. I was going to set great screens for (teammates) Ryan (Elmquist), Mike (Edwards) and Todd (Cramer), and make sure they got open shots.”

He fought for his spot in practice every day, and it eventually paid off.

“He ended up getting back the starting position because of his attitude and what he was bringing to the floor with the other four guys,” Caltech head coach Oliver Eslinger said. “The chemistry was really good.”

In Caltech’s second-last game, on the road at SCIAC regular season co-champion Claremont-Mudd-Scripps, Murphy held All-SCIAC junior forward Joseph Anderson to his lowest scoring and rebounding output of the season.

At the end of season banquet Friday night, Murphy was presented with four awards: Leader of the Year; Mr. Hustle; the Construction Award, given to the player who accumulates the most deflections, steals and offensive rebounds — “all the little things that add up to being really competitive,” Eslinger said; and the Mr. Glue Award for keeping the team together on and off the court.

“His commitment is the model for our program,” Eslinger said.

Murphy tries to lead his team by example.

“He wasn’t afraid of being vocal in practice and off the court, too, if we weren’t doing something right,” said Edwards, a sophomore forward. “He has experience at being the guy in charge and he also has a strong presence whenever we are together outside of practice.”

Murphy honed his leadership skills after assuming the starting quarterback position his junior year at Colony, playing alongside older brother Jaron, who played running back.

“He brought exactly what I thought he’d bring: leadership, toughness, the desire to win and improve,” Eslinger said. For these reasons, his teammates elected him a captain after his freshman season. “When he was a freshman, because we had no upperclassmen, he was forced to start. He came off the bench the first few games, but he ended up claiming the spot because of everything could do on the floor and how tough he was.”

Murphy attributes this toughness to his upbringing.

The computer science major comes from a family of commercial fishermen. Most of his summers were spent out on the boat helping his father Brian fish, and returning to Wasilla just in time for football season.

“Out there (on the boat) there’s not a lot of sympathy for complaining, like, ‘I’m tired’ or ‘I’m sore.’ Everyone’s tired, everyone’s sore. The long hours are brutal. But I feel like working at such a young age made me appreciate things a little bit more, kept me in shape, kept me in focus,” Murphy said.

Last summer he interned at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory programming algorithms to compare spectrometer readings, he is looking for internships for this summer to gain more experience in the computer science field.

“I want to do something that will help my career, but if not, I’m more than happy to help my family out,” he said. “I appreciate it, but it’s not something I want to do for the rest of my life.”

Basketball isn’t something Murphy will be doing for the rest of his life either; but his resolve has not wavered, even after Caltech’s 0-25 campaign in his first year and sustaining an injury to his elbow in the final game which forced him to undergo surgery in the middle of mid-term exams.

“It really hindered my ability to improve my shot over the summer,” said Muphy, who averaged nearly four points, four rebounds, two assists and 1.5 steals per game last year. “I was in a cast until June, and even when I came back, I had pain when shooting.”

Eslinger said he’ll work with Murphy to improve his ball handling and his shot to become a consistent threat from the perimeter.

“Hopefully, next year I’ll be able to add a little more than hustle,” Murphy said. “I want to be an adept three-point shooter, someone who people will have to keep a guy on. I want them to think, ‘You can’t leave No. 22 open, he’ll hit that.’ So, whether that means I’m going to be starting next year or whether I have to come off the bench, I’ll come to practice every day, working hard, continuing to lead the team.”

Ashley Zeldin is a freelance writer in California.