

His career turned upside down, 'Jewish Jordan' starts anew

by Kevin Mulligan
February 15, 2000
Knight-Ridder Newspapers

TAKOMA PARK, Md. — It was going to be the perfect senior year for Tamir Goodman.

Fun with high school friends. Completion of his Jewish studies at Talmudical Academy, a tiny Orthodox yeshiva in Baltimore. Continued success and development on the basketball court. Finally, signing his national letter of intent to attend Maryland on a basketball scholarship.

These were to be memories that last a lifetime.

"It's supposed to be the best year of your life," said Goodman, "for most high school kids."

The sad part of the complicated and unique Tamir Goodman story, one that the Philadelphia Daily News chronicled exactly one year ago, is that the engaging 18-year-old is exactly like most high school teenagers. With one gigantic exception: Goodman is a wonderfully gifted basketball player who has remained committed to a life of Torah observance.

The yarmulke-clad teen, nicknamed "the Jewish Jordan" for his scoring ability (38.8 points per game as a junior) and creativity (7.9 assists per game last year) with the ball, has won widespread admiration from athletes, coaches and parents, as well as Jewish leaders, for his unwavering dedication to both athletics and religion. Some, however, might say his love of the game and devotion to Judaism and its values have cost him dearly.

Goodman's dream senior year has been turned upside down. Prominent among the reasons:

Being asked to leave Talmudical Academy just before school opened in September if he wanted to continue serious basketball pursuits. "I loved it there," he said. "The rabbis couldn't handle the whole basketball thing, the circus some said we had become, because of me. So, they asked me to find a school that would accommodate me better. It really hurt, and it still does."

A sprained medial collateral knee ligament suffered early last summer, which sidelined him for several weeks. The injury occurred the day before he was scheduled to leave for the prestigious adidas Camp, featuring the nation's elite prep players, at Fairleigh Dickinson. Against doctors' wishes, Goodman attempted to play through the injury, and, unable to perform to his normal standards, became a target for detractors.

"I wanted to compete against the best," he said. "I couldn't just stand and watch. It was like I'd been working on my 'A' paper, and it came time to hand it to the teacher and the dog eats it. And then to hear and read people ripping me and saying I was faking injury... that's the first time it really got to me. It took a mental hit on me like you wouldn't believe."

Goodman and his parents were told in a summer meeting with Maryland head basketball coach Gary Williams that the university was withdrawing its scholarship offer extended a year earlier (Goodman orally committed in the fall of 1998) because the school (and the Atlantic Coast Conference) would not accommodate Goodman's Orthodox Jewish observance of the Sabbath, among other religion-based needs. Television dictates ACC scheduling. Reports said Williams also may have overreacted to Goodman's injury, re-evaluated the kid's potential and factored in the religious concessions, and decided to move on.

"The bandwagon was totally empty," Goodman said, "except for my close friends and family. I didn't have a high school to go to and no college, and making it worse, I was still in therapy, not playing ball either."

Seated on Monday in the office of Joe Perrone, his new coach at Takoma Academy, Goodman slowly shook his head, as if in disbelief, and looked a visitor in the eye.

"It's amazing how God works," he said.

Goodman is resolutely coping with the daily, 35-mile commute to his new high school, Takoma Academy, a Seventh Day Adventist-run private school tucked in the middle of a culturally diverse neighborhood just inside the Washington Beltway, a 40-minute drive (off-peak) southwest of Baltimore's Inner Harbor. Takoma, with few Caucasians among the predominantly African-American student body (400), presents a stark contrast to Goodman's previous educational setting. He begins each day with religious education classes at a neighboring Jewish school, followed by his secular courses at Takoma.

Takoma has been an excellent fit for Goodman, because of the Adventist's similarities to Judaism, including observance of the Sabbath.

"We typically don't recruit," said Perrone, a Seventh Day Adventist, "but when we heard he was looking for a school... knowing our similarities with observance of the Sabbath, the Scriptures and the Old Testament, I thought we would be a good fit for Tamir. And it's just been wonderful. I think God really was looking out for him."

Goodman is Takoma's tallest starter. The Tigers, 13-7, compete in Maryland's competitive Independent League. The conference includes Montrose Christian, of Rockville, which was nationally ranked until last week's loss to rival Riverdale Baptist. "I'm not the show here," he said. "I just do my job, do what I can to help my team and try to make the best of everything."

He is doing fine, despite the fact that he's terribly miscast by Perrone as a wing guard and does not see the ball nearly enough in key situations. Goodman is averaging 23 points, 6.5

assists, 9 rebounds and 5 steals this season. He will represent the Washington-Baltimore area against a team of U.S. stars in the prestigious Capital Classic at USAir Arena on April 11.

In November, despite phone calls to Perrone from several major basketball powers, Goodman signed a national letter of intent to play at nearby Towson, after exhaustive homework by head coach Mike Jaskulski regarding Goodman's religious and educational needs.

The America East Conference, which includes Drexel University and Delaware, has fully supported Towson's desire to accommodate Goodman's Sabbath observance, which prevents him from participating in any activities (practice, games, etc.) from sundown Friday through dusk on Saturday.

"I had so much doubt about my future when everything seemed to be coming apart," said Goodman, who has bulked up to 170. "And, all of a sudden, everything is turning out great."

"I think I've given Takoma my 110 percent and the people have been good to me, and I couldn't be more excited about Towson next year. I owe them everything. I could never repay them for all they've done to support me."

Goodman decided to sign with Towson when Jaskulski pressed for an early commitment, because he realized the countless arrangements that would be required by Towson.

Combined with Towson's commitment to meet his needs, Goodman also did not want to risk waiting, only to have another Maryland situation arise and leave him scrambling.

Jaskulski had been closely monitoring Maryland's actions regarding Goodman. When word of Williams' reversal leaked out, Towson was prepared. And extremely interested.

"As soon as I heard, we jumped in with both feet," Jaskulski said. "TV doesn't determine our schedules, so I thought it was workable. The more we examined things, the more workable it became, with the support of the university, the conference and the rest of the coaches."

A five-hour visit with Tamir and his parents in their home during the early recruiting (contact) period wrapped up the college's commitment. Jaskulski said that his players, familiar with Goodman's personality and talent, enthusiastically approved, even though they may face inconveniences along the way. "I asked them how they felt about it at our Midnight Madness meeting, and to a man, they stood up in support of everything we could do to assist Tamir."

"It's going to be a great experience for all of us, on many levels. Tamir is an exceptional young man. I know how good a player he is, but it's not the numbers, it's his savvy that most impresses me. It's his feel for the game and his ability to see the court and make

everybody better. Things you can't teach."

It is difficult to determine from interviews with Goodman, his father Karl, and Harold "Chaim" Katz, Tamir's close friend and former coach at Talmudical, which hurt more: the treatment by the rabbis or Maryland's handling of the situation.

Rabbi Zvi Teichman, principal at Talmudical, denied forcing Goodman to find another school. "We couldn't provide the type of basketball schedule and commitment Tamir was seeking," he said. "He could have chosen to stay and play on a lower burner, so to speak."

"The toughest thing for Tamir will be not graduating with his school friends at Talmudical," Karl Goodman said.

Tamir grew up fantasizing about someday wearing the Maryland colors and playing against North Carolina, Duke and the rest of the ACC. Tamir understands the result. He just wishes Maryland hadn't escalated his hopes so prematurely.

"I just don't think Williams understood what the Sabbath is, and the depth of Tamir's commitment to observance," said Karl Goodman. "The Sabbath is not negotiable. To me, it looked like corporate hardball, and fortunately we don't have to worry about that anymore."

A spokesman for Williams cited NCAA recruiting rules prohibiting Williams from commenting about "recruitable athletes."

"I just wish Maryland would have said in the first place, 'Sorry, Tamir, we can't do it,'" he said. "But you don't promise a kid a dream birthday present and then not give it to him. They should have done what Towson did. Look into everything thoroughly before they offered me."

"Maryland should have done its homework before they dangled the apple in my face."

On this night, just 62 spectators attend Takoma's upset of The Heights. Just five Takoma supporters are wearing yarmulkes: a few Goodmans, Katz and another friend of Tamir's.

The circus left town many months ago.

Unlike a year ago, there isn't a Jewish child to be found in the practically empty 3,000-seat school auditorium. There are no Goodman banners or media crush, and after the game, the schoolboy sensation is not mobbed for autographs by kids waving their yarmulkes.

"I think I like it like this better," Goodman said, with a wide smile. "That was fun at first, but it got old real quick."

"I'm enjoying just being myself again. I love that my teacher tells me to pick up papers off the floor after class. I love being bumped around in school. I love being a regular kid again."

O'Neal, Duncan rise to MVP occasion

by Fred Mitchell
February 14, 2000
Chicago Tribune

OAKLAND — In the ultimate showcase of stars, a couple of 7-footers stood above the rest.

Shaquille O'Neal of the Lakers and Tim Duncan of the San Antonio Spurs keyed the West to a 137-126 victory over the East on Sunday at the Arena.

small, very fast. (But) we had spectacular one-on-one plays."

In a game full of highlight-film material, Jackson noted his favorite.

"I think Tim Duncan's left-handed dunk at the end of the game was an incredible display of versatility and power at the same time," Jackson said.

O'Neal's favorite play? "I like the fast break better. My



Shaquille O'Neal, of the Los Angeles Lakers, slams down two points in front of Atlanta's Dikembe Mutombo during the 2000 NBA All-Star game at the Oakland Arena, Sunday, February 13, 2000.

The Twin Towers from rival Western Conference contenders shared the Most Valuable Player award and once again showed that size does matter.

"Size really was the difference in this game," said West coach Phil Jackson. "The size and athleticism we had was the difference."

East coach Jeff Van Gundy of the Knicks agreed with Jackson.

"Well, their size, I think, was overwhelming for us, just because of the structure of the team. We had basically (guards), and at least we had a couple of big guys. But not enough to really compete inside with them."

O'Neal, who also blocked three shots, achieved his numbers even though he sat out the fourth quarter with a stiff shoulder.

O'Neal missed out on an All-Star Game MVP award three years ago in San Antonio when Michael Jordan was awarded the honor.

"It was his time," said Kobe Bryant, O'Neal's Laker teammate.

Duncan and Kevin Garnett each scored 24 points and O'Neal tallied 22. Duncan also pulled down 14 rebounds and O'Neal nine.

"There were a lot of exciting players on the floor, especially on that East end," O'Neal said. "They were very

teammates were calling me the 'Big Luggage' because of my handles," O'Neal said.

"In these kind of games, our concern as a coaching staff... obviously all my coaches wanted to win this game because I think the difference in pay is 2 to 1," Jackson said. "We thought the shooting of Carter and the speed of Carter and (Grant) Hill would be difficult for Kevin Garnett and Tim Duncan to play. But they're such agile players. They have great moxie. And their ability to cover on the outside and the inside, I thought, was very good. And Shaq was a powerhouse out there."

The West outrebounded the East 58-46. And West point guard Jason Kidd of Phoenix handed out a game-high 14 assists. West guard Gary Payton of Seattle had eight assists.

"It's a lot of fun playing with those guys," said Duncan. "I play with them during the summer, and it's incredible to be out there with them. You have to keep your eyes open and your head up because they'll find you wherever you are. To have something like that on the court takes a lot of pressure off you. You have to run with them and know that the ball is coming at some point."

Griffey deal is richest in baseball

by Dana Pennett
February 11, 2000
Knight-Ridder Tribune

When Ken Griffey Jr. talked about being traded from Seattle because he wanted to be closer to home, everyone assumed he meant nearer to his exclusive enclave outside of Orlando, Fla.

Turns out he meant home. Really and truly home. The place where he grew up and played high school ball and watched Pops help fuel the Big Red Machine.

And so Thursday, Griffey put to bed the rumors and speculation that filled the winter months to return to the place where baseball started for him. He was dealt to the Cincinnati Reds for four players and agreed to a nine-year, \$112.5 million contract. It's the richest deal in baseball, topping the Los Angeles Dodgers' six-year, \$105 million whopper for Kevin Brown, though that could change when, as expected, the Yankees sign Derek Jeter. The extension, which covers 2000 to 2008 and includes an option for 2009, comes just before the deadline set by Griffey and Seattle management. Both sides wanted everything completed before spring training began.

In exchange for its 10-time All-Star, Seattle gets righthander Brett Tomko and centerfielder Mike Cameron, along with a pair of minor leaguers, infielder Antonio Perez and righthander Jake Meyer.

"It doesn't matter how much money you make. It's where you're the happiest," said Griffey, wearing the jersey and cap of his new team after flying from Florida on owner Carl Lindner's private plane for a news conference. "I thought Cincinnati is the place I would be happiest. Hopefully

I can have the same luck my father had here and win some championships."

The trade ended a furious 24 hours for the Reds, who agreed to a tentative deal with Seattle on Wednesday and were granted 72 hours to work out a contract extension with Griffey to finalize the trade.

As recently as Tuesday, the Reds feared they wouldn't be able to afford Griffey beyond this season, the final year of his contract. Seattle cleared the way by allowing Griffey's agent, Brian Goldberg, to talk directly to Cincinnati, a move that might have violated baseball's tampering rule.

Through Goldberg, Griffey assured the Reds he would accept a less-than-market value deal to come home, and the two teams agreed to the five-player exchange Wednesday. By Thursday, Griffey and the Reds worked out the gargantuan deal fitting for the man many consider the best all-around player in the game. Roughly \$57.5 million of the contract's total will be paid over a 16-year period after the contract ends.

The 30-year-old Griffey is just entering his prime, his sweet lefthanded swing still hitting its stride.

It was not a swing the Mariners wanted to lose, but they had little hope of keeping it. That became obvious when Griffey turned down a reported eight-year, \$148 million contract extension from Seattle last year.

"February 10, 2000, will go down in Reds' history, major league history, as the day the Michael Jordan of baseball came home to Cincinnati," Reds general manager Jim Bowden said.

Griffey originally implied that he wanted to be nearer to his off-season digs in Florida, but ultimately whittled his choices to one, his true hometown.

Along the way, he blocked a trade to the New York Mets.

Hey, home is home. Cincinnati is the city where Junior signed up for Little League and starred for Moeller High School, where he set records of 11 home runs in a season and 20 in a career. And, of course, Cincinnati also is the place where his father, Ken Sr., starred and Junior frolicked in the clubhouse with other famous namesakes, including Pete Rose Jr. Now Dad serves as a bench coach and chances are, during his son's tenure, he'll be calling the shots. Many consider Ken Sr. a likely candidate to replace manager Jack McKeon, who has a one-year contract.

"The last time I put on this uniform, I think I was 8, for a father-son game," Junior said. "This is something I dreamed about as a little kid, being back in my hometown, where I watched so many great players."

He couldn't have picked a better time to head home. Cincinnati, always serious about baseball, finally has an organization that feels the same way again. Gone are the circus days of Marge Schott. In her place is Lindner, a banana magnate, who proved by simply going after Griffey that Cincinnati no longer intends to be grouped among the poor-sister, small-market teams. The city is already in the midst of building a new stadium and Griffey's presence will only fan the flames of baseball fever, as he chases Hank Aaron's home-run record, on the banks of the Ohio River.

As word spread Junior was coming home again, ticket salespeople couldn't keep up with the ringing telephones at Cinergy Field. Even before the trade was finalized, one sporting-goods store, Koch's, displayed a Reds Griffey

jersey in its window. Once the deal was official, fans plunked hastily made "Welcome Home" signs in their front lawns and honked their horns in joy.

"His name comes up like Pete Rose's name as far as Cincinnati," said Ron Oester, a Cincy native who played second base for the Reds. "That's the magnitude he's at for Cincinnati fans."

Of course, warm fuzzies aside, baseball is about wins and losses, and certainly the Reds have set themselves up well in that department by bringing Griffey on board.

With Junior back in town, the Reds are suddenly much more than the sweet, little, \$33 million-payroll paupers who lost to the mighty Mets in a one-game playoff for the final wildcard spot last year. Their wallets are a little bit heavier, as is their lineup. Griffey brings his 398 career home runs, .299 average and 1,152 RBI to a team that already added considerable firepower when it acquired Dante Bichette from Colorado last October. Best of all for the Reds, they were able to get Griffey without sacrificing future stars Pokey Reese and Sean Casey.

His arrival also turns the NL Central into baseball's world of home-run derby, with Griffey, the Chicago Cubs' Sammy Sosa and the St. Louis Cardinals' Mark McGwire all swinging for the fences from the same division.

The trade doesn't, however, do anything to help Cincinnati's already-suspect rotation. Tomko, 26, went just 5-7 in 26 starts last season with a 4.92 earned run average, but was the best young starter on the Reds' staff.

Not that anyone was missing Tomko Thursday.

"It's like being traded for Jordan or something," Tomko said.

Tom Landry dies at 75



Former Dallas Cowboys coach Tom Landry died Saturday after nearly a year-long fight with leukemia. The 75-year-old Landry coached the Cowboys from 1960 to 1988, winning two Super Bowls in five appearances.