

Junior guard Colella fulfilling dream at University Park

By Emily Kaplan COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

When Linda Colella and her husband, Dave, made the three-plus hour drive to visit their son in State College last weekend, they weren't expecting to be greeted by presents.

Nick Colella, BASKETBALL however, had a surprise. He handed them each a custom-made T-shirt — which he had designed himself — with his name and basketball number on the back.

Right then, Linda teared up. She knew her son had finally accomplished his goal.

Colella transferred to Penn State's main campus this semester after spending two years at Penn State-Behrend. The 6-foot-3 New Castle native played two seasons for the Division III Lions, but had bigger dreams: D-I ball.

So when he finally got an opportunity, Colella worked hard — "harder than anybody else," Linda insisted — and made it happen. After open-tryouts last month, Colella was invited as a walk-on for the Nittany Lions this season. He is now on their 15-man roster.

Colella's parents attended the team's home exhibition against East Stroudsburg on Sunday. And though Nick didn't get to play — he sat at the end of the bench dressed in a shirt and tie — Linda didn't care.

"We were just proud to see him on the bench, on the floor, part of the team," she said. "I got teary-eyed again just seeing him there."

Colella said it was always his goal to transfer to University Park after two years, as long as he kept his grades up. He did, and made

the plans official last spring. Behrend coach Dave Niland said he preferred not to talk about Colella's departure. The coach hasn't spoken with his former player since he made the team at Penn State, and said simply: "This is a four-year program. If someone leaves, it's like it's a transfer. If this was one of Nick's goals then I'm happy for him."

It was Colella's goal — in fact, it was his No. 1 priority. So this summer, he went through an extensive training program to prepare himself for the Nittany Lions' tryout.

Colella had a summer job with the New Castle Housing Authority. Right when he got off work, he would go straight to the gym, then to summer league games.

"I got involved with every summer league that I could," Colella said. "Played with a lot of guys, in a lot of games. Then basically

became a gym rat. It was basketball 24/7."

That work ethic extended to the fall, when he enrolled in classes at Penn State.

His freshman year, Colella came up to the University Park campus a couple times to visit friends. Randomly, he met some of the Penn State women's basketball players and became friends.

"Then when I got here they told me they have some guys who play against them in practice," Colella said. "And right away, I was like, 'Sign me up. I'm there.'"

So Colella became a women's practice player. And when he wasn't with the Lady Lions, he was doing one thing.

"Every time I called him this fall, he was working out, working out, working out," his mother said. "All the time."

It paid off. Colella said he felt

good after last month's tryouts. He said he thought he did what he needed to do, playing "good, fundamental basketball."

A couple days later, his phone rang. Not surprisingly, Colella was in the weight room when the coaches called. They asked him to come up for a meeting.

"I was at work that morning when Nick texted me and said the coaches wanted a meeting with him," Li Li recalled. "And I was like, 'Oh my god, this has to be a good thing. It's happening. All of his hard work has finally paid off.'"

To e-mail reporter: exk5049@psu.edu



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