

Wyant, Eppley fulfill their dreams

Written by Mike Kelly

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Watauga High senior Josh Wyant and former Pioneer Chad Eppley are living the dream of a lifetime.

Both men will continue their athletic careers playing at the Division I level this coming season. Wyant will walk on and play baseball at Winston-Salem State University; Eppley is a preferred walk-on at the University of San Francisco.

Wyant, who transferred in from Maiden High School last fall, was a huge addition to the WHS baseball team.

The senior, an All-Northwestern 3A/4A Conference selection, paced the Pioneers with a steady glove at second base, and with some clutch hitting at the plate. Wyant, who started 26 games for the Pioneers, batted .374 with 34 hits, six doubles, a home run and 20 runs-batted-in. He had a .426 on base percentage, and a .929 fielding percentage. Pitching-wise, Wyant made three appearances, did not give up an earned run, scattered four hits, struck out two men, walked one and earned a save.

"It's certainly a big moment for Josh," said his father Michael Wyant, the principal at Watauga High. "You just never know when an opportunity will come up. Fortunately for Josh, Winston-Salem State is starting up a baseball program, and he's getting a chance to continue playing."

Winston-Salem State, which recently became a Division I Independent, will play at the Division II level in baseball. Kevin Ritsche will lead the program in its first year. The Rams will start competing in the spring of 2011. Wyant will major in Special Education. Wyant was a three-sport athlete last season: swimming, cross country and baseball. He also won the Trailblazer Award.

Eppley, on the other hand, has slowly worked his way up the ladder of college basketball. Stricken by mono during his junior year at WHS, and playing with a team that didn't have a point guard his senior year, Eppley found his way to Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute. Following a two-year stay with the Cobras, his opportunity to play Division I basketball finally came true.

"I was very fortunate," Eppley said. "I just kept looking around for the chance to play, and San

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Francisco turned out to be the one. They gave me a chance, and I decided to take it. I've heard of their great tradition with (Bill) Russell and all, and I'm excited to be going there."

The Dons won the NIT title in 1949 and they won back-to-back NCAA championships in 1955 and 1956. Russell, K.C. Jones, Bill Cartwright are among the legendary players who wore the green and gold. The Dons are members of the West Coast Conference. Eppley will leave for San Francisco August 19. He is a preferred walk-on with the Dons. The University of San Francisco is a Jesuit Catholic school that was founded in 1855. It has a strong academic background. The basketball team, following an inhouse investigation, received the death penalty for severe NCAA violations.

The basketball program was out of commission from four years (from 1981-82 until 1984-85) before it was resurrected in the summer of 1985. And the school is currently on probation until June of 2012 after more than a dozen athletes spent more than \$13,000 in scholarship money to improperly buy textbooks.

Rex Walters, who played at Kansas, is the Dons' current head coach. The Dons are 23-37 during his two-year stay with the program. He replaced Eddie Sutton, who retired following the 2007-08 season.

"It's a great opportunity for me," said Eppley. "I get to live in a great city, and I'm going to a school with a great basketball tradition. Being a preferred walk-on, I'll be given every chance possible, but I've got to earn it.

"I want to dress for games, and I want to travel with the team. I'm confident in my abilities, and I'll give it all I've got. This is what I've always wanted (to play D-I basketball), and I'm going to make the most of it. I am so excited and thankful for this chance."

The Dons, who received an NCAA berth in 1998 and made it to NIT in 2005, pulled off a huge upset last season by knocking off WCC powerhouse Gonzaga at home.

The Dons will be featured on ESPNU on February 17, when they travel to Portland for a WCC game.