

Carter stands tall in ASU debut

Written by Mike Kelly

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The journey of a 1,000 miles begins with the first step.

And for Omar Carter, a red-shirt junior at Appalachian State University, that long journey seems to have finally paid off. Carter made quite a splash with his new team Friday night as he poured in a game-high 35 points in his Mountaineers' debut. The end result, he led ASU to an 89-86 win over Tulsa, giving the Mountaineers their first season-opening road win in 17 years.

"When I hit that first three, I just felt it," said Carter, who was 10-18 from the floor and 5-7 from the three-point line. "I had a lot of confidence in my shot, and I did what I had to do to help our team win."

And if Carter continues this pace, what a compliment he will be to Donald Sims, the Southern Conference Player of the Year last season. Those two will give ASU a dominating presence and arguably, the best backcourt in the Southern Conference.

"I knew from day one he could score," said Sims, who had a strong performance of his own with 18 points and seven assists against Tulsa. "And with people double-teaming me, he knew it was on him to make the big shots. I'm telling you, the guy is scary. And with both of us back there, it creates a lot of problems for defenses. Tulsa went through that tonight."

But for Carter, the journey began back in high school. A four-time all-conference player, Carter led Charlotte Christian High School to a state-championship game appearance, which earned him all-state honors.

From there, he signed with Charleston Southern in the Big South Conference. And Carter, a 6-5 guard who is very athletic, caught fire right away in his new environment.

He arguably had the best season by a freshman in school history. Carter became the first freshman to lead his team in both scoring (15.5 points per game) and rebounding (6.5 rpg). For his efforts, he became the first freshman in Charleston Southern history to earn Big South Freshman of the Year honors, and was also named to the Big South All-Freshman Team. He was also second on the team in scoring (13.3) and led the Buccaneers in rebounding (7.9) his sophomore year. But then it all came to a halt.

For the last 18 months, Carter, who announced he was transferring to ASU during the second semester of his sophomore year in 2009, has been sitting on the shelf waiting for his chance to play again because of various NCAA rules.

NCAA rules state that if a player transfers from one Division I school to another, they must sit out a full year. But because Carter announced he was transferring during his second semester at CSU, he wasn't eligible to play again until this season.

But despite all that, Carter kept his cool, and his opportunity finally came Friday night. And boy, was he ever ready.

"What people don't realize is that Omar has been practicing with us since he got here (in the summer of 2009)," said ASU coach Jason Capel, who benefited from Carter's performance by capturing his first career win. "He was so responsible for our guys being game-ready last year. They had to work against him in practice every day.

"And the thing I like about Omar, he's always ready. He's willing to work and do what he has to do to make our team successful. I knew he was anxious to play, and I'm happy for him it turned out like it did."

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Carter made his statement from the get-go. But his biggest shot came in the second half with 8:57 left. Capel was hit with a technical foul, and the Mountaineers trailed 58-56. But Carter drilled a three that put ASU on top to stay.

From there, the Mountaineers built their biggest lead at 13 points, and staved off a huge comeback try by the Golden Hurricane down the stretch.

"Man, it's been a year-and-a-half," Carter said. "And it felt good to be out there again. It's exciting. I've been watching my teammates, and chomping to get out there.

"But I stayed positive, and kept working hard. And through the advice of my teammates, and my family members, I just went out there and showed my team what I can do. And I did, and lookout for ASU."

And as the old cliché goes, good things come to those who wait. And for Carter the wait is over. Welcome home.