

'The Blind Side'

Written by Josh Parrott
Thursday, 21 November 2013 13:32

Augustine Rubit's game, much like his name, stands out in the world of college basketball.

The fifth-year senior from South Alabama will leave Mobile with his name etched in the record books for the Jaguars and the Sun Belt Conference. Last season he was the SBC's Player of the Year and an honorable mention Associated Press All-American after averaging 19.4 points and 10.5 rebounds per game.

For all of the attention Rubit has received for his production on the court, he has worked even harder to find success in the classroom. In December he will become the first member of his family to earn a college degree.

Rubit also has been nominated for the Senior CLASS Award, which goes to the NCAA Division I senior who best displays ideals in the areas of community, classroom, character and competition.

"Getting my degree is definitely a big deal, mostly because of how proud my family will be," said Rubit, who is one of seven children. "All of them are looking forward to it. I'm still just amazed to have the opportunity to play college basketball and get my degree."

To understand why Rubit is amazed, first you have to know what the 6-foot-7, 230-pound forward has already overcome.

The 24-year-old Texas native grew up in a low-income neighborhood on the northeast side of Houston without a father. His mother was in and out of his life while battling substance abuse, so he was raised by his older sister and later his godmother.

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Rubit was quiet but lacked discipline and showed little interest in school. He flunked the sixth grade before getting back on track and taking up an interest in sports, specifically basketball.

"It was considered a tough part of town, but it was normal to me," Rubit said. "You had people walking the streets. I think it would be tough for some people. For me it was all I knew. I just took things day by day."

Rubit's life took a big turn the day he met the Trauber family the summer after his freshman year at Smiley High School.

Former Rice basketball player Steve Trauber and his wife, Leticia, planned to form an AAU team. They sought out at-risk youngsters who had the potential to attend college with some direction.

Rubit attended tryouts for the team in 2006 and made an immediate impression.

"He was a very shy young man who didn't call very much attention to himself aside from his ability on the court," said Trauber. "His situation was not ideal because he did not have any mentors or adults that were support figures for him."

Despite becoming a dominant rebounder and low-post scorer in high school, Rubit still faced an uphill battle to become academically eligible to play college basketball. It did not help that Smiley High School had a poor academic reputation.

The Traubers provided Rubit with the moral, emotional and academic support he needed. That included hiring tutors and enrolling him in correspondence courses and online classes. He

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eventually moved in with the family. His confidence grew, as did his grades and dreams.

"He was a young man who happened to find himself in an unfortunate life circumstance," Trauber said. "In a testament to his great character, he took a little bit of help and fought through it."

Ronnie Arrow – who coached Rubit at South Alabama until unexpectedly retiring last December – said Rubit's story reminds him of the "The Blind Side," the book-turned-to-movie based on the life of Baltimore Ravens offensive tackle Michael Oher.

"It was 'The Blind Side' only rewritten for basketball," said Arrow. "That family has a big heart. They treated him like one of their own sons."

Rubit, who later transferred to Christian Life Center Academy in nearby Humble for his senior season in 2008-09, signed with South Alabama after being recruited by several Division I programs. He averaged 22 points and nine rebounds per game that season for his loaded prep team.

A big reason for picking the Jaguars: The strong academic support services for their student-athletes.

"I felt like they cared," Rubit said about South Alabama. "Coach Arrow is from Houston, and everybody respects him as a person. They were interested in me becoming a great player and getting my degree, not just about playing basketball for them."

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Rubit actually had to wait a year before playing at South Alabama following a mix-up with the NCAA Clearinghouse. Instead of Rubit leaving to play immediately in junior college, the Traubers paid for him to attend South Alabama as a freshman. He was ineligible to play in games in the 2009-10 season but practiced with the team and sat out as a redshirt. Instead of complaining about the setback, Rubit went to work.

"It probably turned out to be a good thing for him," Trauber said. "He got to practice with the team, improve his body and got some classes under his belt."

Rubit's hard work paid off the following season when he averaged a double-double (13.1 ppg, 11 rpg) and was sixth nationally in rebounding. He was the SBC's Freshman of the Year and made the all-conference third team and Basketball Times All-Freshman second team.

As a redshirt sophomore, Rubit led the SBC again in rebounding (9.2 rpg) and was first-team all-conference. He also finished second in the league in scoring (15.2 ppg).

Last season Rubit became the first player in SBC history to lead the league in rebounding three consecutive years. He was also one of two Division I players to rank in the top 25 in scoring and rebounding as the Jaguars advanced to the CollegeInsider.com Postseason Tournament.

UALR coach Steve Shields joked that he will be happy when Rubit, the preseason SBC Player of the Year after winning the league's top honor at the end of last season, is no longer around to torment conference opponents.

"He is a very special player and a relentless offensive rebounder," Shields said. "We had a guy here a few years back, Rashad Jones-Jennings, who led the nation in rebounding, and I think Rubit is along the same lines as him. He is very skilled, can score the basketball in different ways and is tough to keep off the glass and the foul line."

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As of Nov. 19, Rubit was second in the SBC this season in rebounding (10.7 rpg) and averaging 14.3 points and 1.3 blocks per game. For his career he has the most double-digit rebounding games (53) in school history and is second in rebounds (923) and double-doubles (43) and fifth in points (1,433). South Alabama's top career rebounder is former NBA forward Terry Catledge (932).

Rubit, named to the Lou Henson Preseason All-America Team as one of the nation's top mid-major players, also has grabbed the fifth-most rebounds in SBC history. He needs 88 rebounds to break the league rebounding record of 1,010 set by former UALR standout Muntrelle Dobbins in 1997.

First-year South Alabama coach Matthew Graves came away impressed with Rubit after they met for an on-court workout immediately following his introductory press conference last March.

"How good is he? I think he could play for any team in the country because of his ability to rebound," said Graves, a former assistant coach at Butler. "A player like him doesn't come around all that often in the Sun Belt. I feel blessed to be able to coach him in my first year."

Rubit dreams of playing in the NBA, but his goals for this season are to be an All-American on the court and in the classroom and to lead South Alabama to the NCAA tournament for the first time since 2008. The league's coaches picked the Jaguars to finish second in the SBC this season behind Western Kentucky.

"I'm not thinking about points or rebounds or all-conference honors," Rubit said. "I want to finish up as strong as possible in the classroom, win the conference and make the NCAA tournament and everything else will take care of itself."

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No matter where Rubit finishes in the record books, Arrow said his former star would leave behind an unforgettable legacy as a player and person.

"I think he will be remembered for being Augustine Rubit and nobody else," Arrow said. "He's a special kid who had a very hard upbringing, but he just kept fighting. You want to see a guy like him make it big in the NBA because of all the hard work he has put in. After everything he's gone through now he can talk to young people and help them along their path."

Asked for his advice to youngsters from a background similar to his own, Rubit said to always work hard, never give up and surround yourself with positive people.

Rubit knows the Traubers helped him get where he is now. And that's why Rubit remains forever grateful to them as he continues his inspirational journey.

"They believed in me, cared about me and wanted me to be successful," Rubit said. "I appreciate everything they've done for me. They motivated me and pushed me to be better in everything I do."

Photo Courtesy: Augustine Rubit, Sun Belt Conference Athletics