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NBA star rookie repays father

PHOENIX (AP) — The NBA All-Star Game has been a tough ticket for years. But not so tough that a famous former football player couldn't snag a pair for himself and his teen-age son.

Because his father, ex-Cowboy Calvin Hill, took him to the 1989 All-Star Game in Houston, Grant Hill will have some idea what to expect when he starts at forward Sunday for the Eastern Conference team.

"I remember Kenny Walker won the slam dunk competition, and I remember the game not being as exciting as everything else — like the parties and all that," said Hill, the Detroit Pistons' rookie whose instant popularity with NBA fans made him the first rookie ever to lead All-Star voting.

Thanks to his earlier experience, Hill is prepared for the glitz and hype of the NBA's showcase game. But nothing — not the pressures of competing in three Final Fours at Duke, not the pressure of being the third pick in last year's NBA draft — could prepare him for the starring role that's been thrust upon him this weekend.

"In '89, I didn't think about any of this," Hill said. He will be only the second rookie to start since Michael Jordan in 1985. And he will also be the spokesman for a rookie game he won't be competing in. He was selected to promote Saturday's game for first-year players well before he was voted into the big game.

As if that wasn't enough, he was supposed to have competed in the slam-dunk competition, too. But he ended up withdrawing, saying he didn't want to risk aggravating a foot injury that kept him out of 12 games in December and January.

Off the court, Hill's wholesome, All-American image will be before television viewers in as many as three commercials for products he's endorsing.

"It's been overwhelming," he said.

Overwhelming, yes. But Hill won't whine about all the pressure or how little time he has for himself. He's just a bit embarrassed, embarrassed that

all this attention is being showered on a 22-year-old who's played in just 34 NBA games and who doesn't rank among the league leaders in any category.

"I'm excited. I think I'll do well," he said. "But I just feel uncomfortable because I haven't played and because I'm a rookie."

And the timing has been tough. Bothered by soreness in his left arch, Hill missed 12 games, returning only nine games before the All-Star break, right about the time the onslaught of All-Star attention started.

Pulled a dozen different ways, Hill has somehow managed to keep it together, leading Detroit in scoring in four games since his return and showing the same fluid moves and explosive first step he showed his first month in the league.

"He's done a fantastic job," Pistons coach Don Chaney said. "He's a special player. Most rookies, the pressure would have gotten to them by now."

"You have to credit the program he came from and especially his parents. He can deal with a lot of different situations. He's so popular. He's able to accommodate the media, the fans and still stay focused on basketball."

And basketball demands a lot of focus. Besides being sidetracked by injury, Hill has had to adjust to the daily grind of the NBA and to something he experienced infrequently at Duke — losing. The Pistons are 17-29 and last in the Central Division.

Hill has been impressive, though, averaging 18.4 points, 5.1 rebounds and 4.3 assists. He leads Detroit with 62 steals.

Well aware that his reputation has raced ahead of his game, Hill will nevertheless handle his All-Star adulation with characteristic poise. But once it's over, he'll happily return to the business of being a rookie.

"I just want to play," he said. "I don't want to worry about demands and exposure. To me, it's still a game I want to win."

PAC-10 NOTES

•STANFORD hasn't won at ARIZONA since 1984-85, or three seasons before Mike Montgomery even arrived on The Farm. Interestingly, the Wildcats' run of 15 straight wins over the Cardinal is one of the longer win streaks between Conference opponents.

•ARIZONA, 18-4, is three wins shy of a 20-win season for the eighth straight year (and the 10th in 11 campaigns)... ARIZONA STATE already has bettered last season's win total of 15... STANFORD, at 15-14, is two wins shy of last year's win total... OREGON, 13-5, is four wins away from its winningest season in Eugene since 1976-77.

•Pac-10 All-Time Top-10 Career List Update: OREGON SR G Orlando Williams now ranks No. 2 in three pointers made (250, No. 1 is 323) and attempted (633)... ARIZONA SR G Damon Stoudamire now ranks No. 3 in

three-pointers made (235) and attempted (596), No. 5 in assists (602) and ranks No. 33 in the 52-member "1,500-Point Club" with 1,623 points... UCLA SR G Tyus Edney ranks No. 9 in assists (529)... STANFORD JR G Dion Cross currently ranks No. 2 in the three-point percentage (46.7). Stanford athletes occupy the top four spots and six of the top seven positions... Also, Williams is five points shy of becoming the 53rd member of the "1,500-point club"; UCLA SR F Ed O'Bannon is 53 points shy of joining the club.

•ARIZONA STATE is 11-0 at home when JR Ron Riley hits for 20 or more... WASHINGTON STATE JR F Mark Hendrickson has 600 career rebounds, an average of 8.3 over his 72-game career.

•Road Sweet Road: Through five weeks of Conference play, the home team is just a modest

25-20. In fact, five Pac-10 teams have winning records on Conference road games.

•WASHINGTON STATE SO G Isaac Fontaine is the only individual to rank among the Pac-10 Top 10 in field goal percentage (52.0, 9th), three-point field goal percentage (49.0, 2nd) and free throw percentage (77.5, 5th). He, along with Mark Hendrickson's league-leading 62.4 percent field goal shooting, is a big reason why the Cougars lead the NCAA in field goal accuracy (51.5).

•UCLA great Kareem Abdul-Jabbar is the newest member of the Basketball Hall of Fame — the 18th member who played or coached in the Pac-10.

•WASHINGTON JR G Michael McClain was suspended for the remainder of the Huskies' season after his arrest for investigation of fourth-degree assault involving a scuffle with a girlfriend.

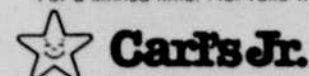
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