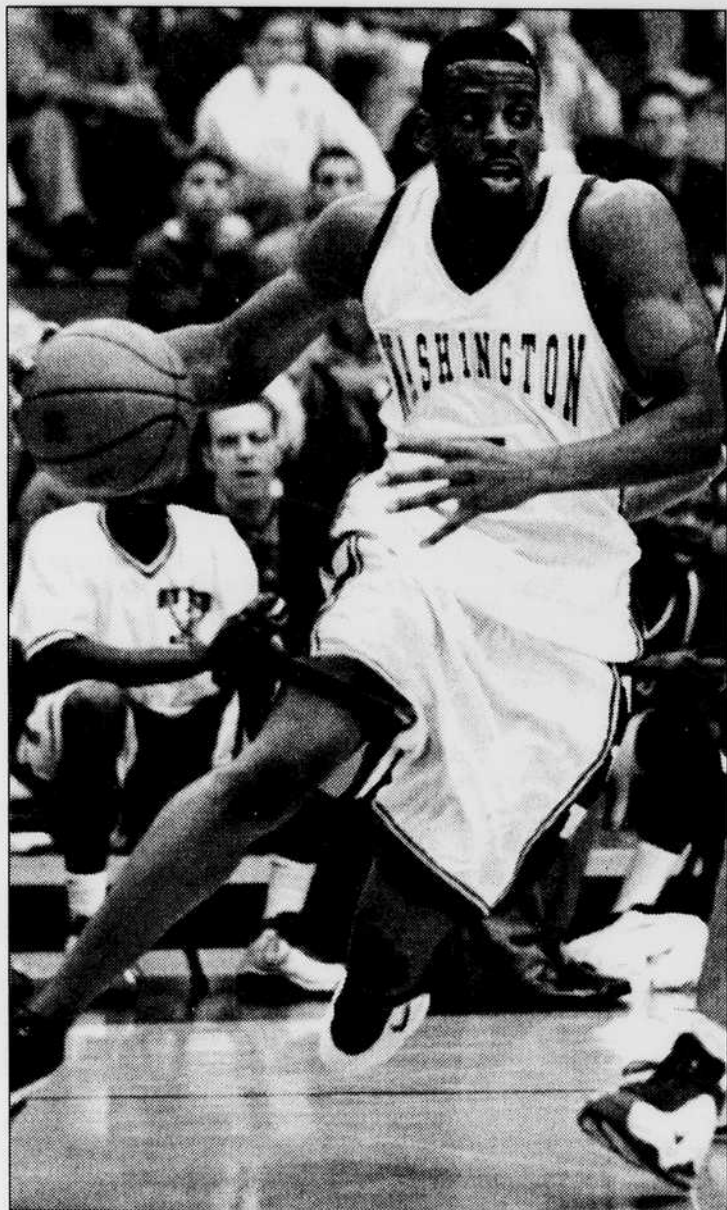


Reunited with friends, Luton finds peace on the court



Guard Deon Luton has emerged as a consistent performer for UW

By Aliya Saperstein
The Daily (University of Washington)

Laughter and basketball. The two loves of Deon Luton's life.

They're also the two reasons the Del City, Okla., native came all the way out to Seattle three years ago. Luton was first spotted by Washington assistant coach Byron Boudreaux when he was still coaching at Oral Roberts in 1994 and 1995. Though Boudreaux soon made the switch to Washington, he made sure to keep in touch with Luton.

"My approach to him was I treated him like a person first. I think a lot of other coaches may have approached him only as a basketball player," Boudreaux says.

"I have a very simple attitude toward recruiting which is, you put everything up front on the table and let young men make their own decisions on how they're going to react to that.

"That's pretty much how we communicated with each other and it developed from there," he says. "Then we started laughing together and it's easy to decide where you're going to go if you are comfortable with the people you're going to be working with."

Former Washington forward Mark Sanford was Luton's host during his recruiting trip, and the two clicked right away. Sanford's presence sealed the deal Boudreaux had already begun. And then, when he arrived at Washington in the fall of 1996, Luton met Jan Wooten, another

newcomer to the team who transferred from junior college in Illinois.

"It was like we were all meant to be together," Luton says.

The three spent that year, when they weren't out on a basketball court somewhere sitting on Sanford's couch, watching television and laughing at old reruns of Martin, or anything else that happened to be on.

But the end of Luton's freshman year, which saw the Huskies go 17-11 with a trip to the National Invitation Tournament, also

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Byron Boudreaux
UW assistant coach

saw Sanford declare he was leaving early for the NBA draft. And with that, the "Three Musketeers," as they jokingly called themselves, were no more.

"It was different, but me and Jan just hung tighter," Luton says of Sanford leaving.

Wooten and Luton became roommates and were nearly inseparable. Whenever one appeared somewhere on campus, the other couldn't be far behind.

On the court, Luton translated his surprising, but inconsistent, freshman season into 15.7 points per game and several Washington records. He now owns both the

single-game and single-season marks for 3-pointers with a seven-three-pointer performance against Southern California and a total of 75. Luton is also just 16 threes away from the Husky all-time career record set from 1987-90 by Eldridge Recasner.

"Every year he gets a little more mature, with a little better understanding of what college athletics is about and his performance every year has gotten a little better," Boudreaux says.

Only two years removed from playing center in high school, Luton became the perimeter-threat portion of the Huskies' Big Three. He, center Todd MacCulloch and fellow guard Donald Watts provided the vast majority of Washington's scoring last season with an average of 50.8 points per game. And the Huskies, of course, made it all the way to the Sweet 16.

But this year Wooten is also gone, though perhaps not as far away as Sanford, who returns to Seattle only occasionally to train. Wooten now has a job as a manager at the JCPenney's in Southcenter Mall. The former Husky point guard has attended all three of Washington's games so far this season, and though he finds it strange to watch from the stands, he intends to be at all of the Washington's home games this season.

"I like it here," says Wooten, who hails from Elizabeth, N.J., "(and) somebody had to stay and watch Deon. So I decided to stay because of that."

Nevertheless, Luton still has to trudge across campus to his Sociology classes alone. And though the junior can say with a straight

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Luton led the Pac-10 with a Washington single-season record 75 three-pointers last year.

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