

Thanks to Coach Clatchey, Mount St. Joseph alums dot the basketball map

A college basketball program relies on more than just the players it puts on the court.

The Maryland men make only their second trip to Baltimore in 19 years Dec. 8, when they meet Loyola University Chicago at Royal Farms Arena. Sister of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Jean Dolores Schmidt, the 99-year-old chaplain who added to the charm of the Ramblers' run to last season's Final Four, doesn't travel in the regular season, but the high school coach responsible for developing 40 percent of the Terps' starting lineup will be in the house.

Jalen Smith, a 6-foot-10-inch freshman and two-time Baltimore Catholic League Player of the Year, averaged 12.6 points and 7.3 rebounds for the Terps during a 7-1 start. Their wings include sophomore Darryl Morsell, the MVP of the 2017 BCL tournament.

Both developed at Mount St. Joseph High School under Pat Clatchey, who's in his 27th season as the Gaels' varsity coach. Before he took over at his alma mater, it had never won a BCL championship. Mount St. Joseph, however, won seven of the 15 BCL tournaments from 2003 to 2017, making Clatchey the first coach in league history with that many tournament titles.

"Find (players) who fit the profile, meaning they meet the criteria of the school and are young men of character," Clatchey said, when asked the philosophy behind Gaels' basketball. "Look for exceptional students, and from a basketball standpoint,

guys who are coachable and willing to work hard.”

National names

Morsell and Smith, who carried a 3.6 GPA at Mount St. Joseph and is majoring in information science in College Park, fit that description.

Terp fans know to enjoy Smith while they can, as he is projected to go high in the first round of the 2019 NBA draft. He figures to be Clatchey’s third NBA player, behind Henry Sims (class of 2008) and Jaylen Adams (’14), a rookie with the Atlanta Hawks.

Sims starred at Georgetown, Adams at St. Bonaventure. Phil Booth, a two-time BCL tournament MVP for the Gaels, is a fifth-year senior at Villanova, where he’s already played on two NCAA championship teams, in 2016 and ’18, and is a Big East Conference all-academic selection to boot.

“It’s no coincidence that our (graduates) are playing for and learning at prominent Catholic universities,” said George Andrews, president of Mount St. Joseph. “Not only is Pat producing good basketball players, (they) represent the shared values of Catholic education at Mount St. Joseph and these universities.

“What makes Pat notable is his commitment to our Xaverian tradition of enduring personal relationships. Our student athletes remain loyal to the school and the program, as do their parents.”

That legacy includes Eric Atkins (’10), who started 105 games for the University of Notre Dame and is now the video coordinator for the Fighting Irish. Clatchey, Atkins said, did more than teach him the “little intricacies” of playing point guard.

“Pat let me make mistakes, a huge reason for my success,” Atkins told the Review.

“He didn’t pull me out when that happened, but helped me through it. He gave me the ball as a freshman to run the varsity. I wasn’t sure if I was ready, but it sped my development.

“He always told me the truth about my game, even if it was harsh. That made me ready for college basketball.”

(Not everyone goes to Division I. The big man for the 2014 BCL champions was Kyle Doran, who starred for and earned a degree from Johns Hopkins University.)

Last March, Loyola Chicago became the fourth No. 11 seed to reach the Final Four. The second was George Mason in 2006, when the Patriots’ leader was Will Thomas, a sophomore forward who was two years removed from Mount St. Joseph, where he famously frustrated Archbishop Spalding and Rudy Gay, now in his 13th season in the NBA.

“Will Thomas was the guy who took our program to another level,” Clatchey said. “He raised the bar of expectations. He had a high basketball IQ and an abundance of toughness and credibility. He brought a ‘refuse to lose’ attitude to practice every day. I respect so many of the guys who played for us, but Will’s up on a pedestal.”

Local knowledge

Clatchey does not abide the parental histrionics that detract from youth athletics, preferring to recruit boys from stable families who do not complain about officiating, let alone coaches.

He grew up in St. Benedict Parish in southwest Baltimore, and began his education at its parish school. Richard and Virginia Clatchey, his parents, also happened to be members of the Order of the Alhambra, a Catholic fraternal organization that since 1961 has hosted a postseason tournament in Allegany County for Catholic high

schools.

“I started going up there when I was 10 or 11 years old, I thought it was the greatest thing in the world,” Clatchey said. “You’re watching great high school basketball in a small-town atmosphere. ... My mom still raises money, as best she can, for the cause (Alhambra). My parents, they’re troupers.”

His peers on a Gwynn Falls Park playground included the late Quintin Dailey, who starred for the former Cardinal Gibbons High. Clatchey played interscholastically for Mount St. Joseph as a freshmen and sophomore, but recognized that his future in the game was in coaching.

He was coaching the Gaels’ freshman team as a 20-year-old; was on the staff at UMBC in the late 1980s; had a brief stint as a pro scout; and then returned to Mount St. Joseph in 1992 as its varsity coach. He was 29, and the new kid on a BCL block filled with legendary coaches, all now retired, a few deceased.

“Guys like Ray Mullis (Cardinal Gibbons), Jerry Savage (Loyola Blakefield), Cokey Robertson (St. Maria Goretti), I grew up watching them coach and run their programs,” Clatchey said. “Mark Amatucci (Calvert Hall), William Wells (St. Frances Academy), Dan Popera (Archbishop Curley) ... there was a lot to learn.”

He also nods in the direction of Morgan Wootten, the DeMatha Catholic High coach who is a member of the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame.

“I read his book, ‘Orphans to Champions,’ when I was 11 or 12,” Clatchey said. “He had autographed it for me. The one time I coached against him, we won (in the opening round of the Alhambra in 2001). I might be the only guy with a winning record against him.”

Wootten recommended Clatchey to coach in the 2009 McDonald’s All-American

game. At the time, Clatchey was teaching physical education at Our Lady of Victory School in Arbutus. It wasn't until four years ago that he went to work full-time at Mount St. Joseph, in its DePaul program.

"I always felt part of the school community, and made a conscious effort to keep an eye on what our guys were doing academically and behaviorally," Clatchey said, "but it makes it a lot easier, having the ability to communicate with them during the school day."

The school's commitment includes a new gym that opened five years ago in the Smith Center. Clatchey's personal blessings begin with his wife, Melanie, "who has allowed me to do this for so long," and sons Clark ('15) and Connor ('19), fellow Mount St. Joseph alums. The family worships at St. Mark in Catonsville.

Clatchey's record includes 658 varsity wins and more than 40 players going on to Division I basketball.

The Gaels hope to challenge defending BCL champion St. Frances Academy with a rotation that includes freshman Antonio Hamlin, sophomore Ausar Crawley, and Jevonte Brown, a 6-11 junior from Toronto who Clatchey said is the Gaels' first upper class transfer in over a decade. Their top scorer is senior guard James Bishop, who has accepted a scholarship to attend Louisiana State University.

"It's a source of pride," said Andrews, the school president, "for alumni as they see Mount St. Joseph's and Coach Clatchey's tradition of excellence represented on a national stage."