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Stars align for UIS big man Miranda

Former Peoria Central player goes from fan to big man

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DeAndre Miranda has been on both sides of the fence.

The University of Illinois Springfield senior has experienced college life as a student athlete and just a student. After playing college basketball for three seasons, he spent the 2008-09 school year as a regular old full-time student and watching UIS Prairie Stars men's basketball home games from the stands.

Sitting out for a year taught him a lesson.

"It kind of made me more humble since I had to be a regular student," Miranda said.

Now, the Peoria Central High School graduate is back in the game.

The 6-foot-7, 230-pound senior forward leads the Stars with 6.2 rebounds per game. He's playing a "big" role for the Stars and has started every game.

Miranda, who averages 5.8 points per game, is the closest player UIS coach Kevin Gamble has to a center.

"He's done a great job for us," Gamble said. "He doesn't score a lot of points, but he does all the dirty work. He plays defense. He rebounds. He's got good feet and moves well.

"He takes the other team's best post player, so every night he has his work cut out. He has some height on him, but he's not a beefy guy. He's a slender post guy, so usually the guy he defends outweigh him a little bit."

During his one-year absence, Miranda played intramural basketball at UIS to keep his skills sharp. His team won the championship.

No place like home

To face some basketball heavyweights, Miranda didn't need to travel farther than his hometown. On weekends, he returned to Peoria for pick-up games at his old high school. He played with and against Peoria products and former Bradley University players Marcellus Sommerville and Daniel Ruffin as well as former Indiana standout A.J. Guyton, who was the Big Ten Co-Player of the Year in 2000 and spent time with the Chicago Bulls.

With Guyton running the show, just showing up didn't get a player court time.

"He wouldn't let just anybody play," Miranda said. "Either he had to know you or you had to have a name for yourself already."

Miranda made a name for himself in high school. He was a starter on Central's 2003 and 2004 Class AA state championship teams as a sophomore and junior and played alongside Shaun Livingston, who was waived by the NBA's Oklahoma City Thunder last month.

Miranda has his theories as to why Peoria produces so much basketball talent.

"Everybody is trying to find a way out of Peoria," he said. "That drives and motivates them, and usually that's what everybody is doing.

"Until my fifth-grade year, I never played basketball, but I was tall. I moved to a new neighborhood (near Bradley), and that's pretty much all we did every day."

After high school

Basketball took him from Peoria to the South after he graduated from high school in 2005. Miranda played at Central Florida Community College for two seasons. He averaged 10 points as a sophomore and attracted interest from NCAA Division I Texas Christian University, Wyoming and Stony Brook. Fellow Great Lakes Valley Conference member Southern Indiana also recruited him. He visited both TCU and Southern Indiana.

In the end, he transferred to Montevallo, an NCAA Division II school in Alabama where he played for a season.

He left Montevallo due to "academic troubles" and enrolled at UIS in hopes of raising his grade-point average so he could use his remaining year of eligibility.

He is majoring in communications and will graduate in the fall.

By the end of the school year, an offer to play for the Stars was on the table. The fact that UIS was moving up from NAIA to NCAA Division II prompted Miranda to accept.

"I was looking for a second chance," Miranda said. "At the end of the day, I was pretty content with staying here because it was that second chance I was looking for."

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