



Jamal Mashburn leaned back on the trainer's table recently, and reflected on his career as a University of Kentucky basketball player and his life as a student. In the last three years, the two have become separate entities.

In terms of his career, life has been extraordinary.

Mashburn, who played high school basketball for Cardinal Hayes in the Bronx, is firmly established as one of the nation's elite players. The 6-foot-8-inch, 240-pound player has achieved the perfect balance between the pivot, where he dominates with a strong, versatile inside game, and the

"A lot of times people are jealous, but everybody's so proud of Jamal, first of all because they know what he had to do to get this far," said Russell Glover, Mashburn's cousin and one of his closest friends. "When he was younger, Jamal had a hard time even getting chosen for a team when they played in back of the building. They called him a big baby, said he would never make it.

"The other reason people are happy for Jamal is because of the kind of person he is," Glover added. "He's quiet, doesn't bother anybody. People want to talk with him or touch him. I remember once a couple of people, I guess they were crackheads,

tucky. But it's not like I'm this big star. I'm just a friend who's had some different experiences."

After playing on a select team of college all-stars who scrimmaged against the United States Olympic squad, Mashburn spent most of last summer in New York. He proudly recalls how he spent a good deal of time in recording studios with Glover, an aspiring musician-writer who plays keyboards and hopes to produce rap, rhythm and blues and gospel groups.

"He's a person I really admire," Mashburn said. "Sometimes I envy him because he's so creative, he taught himself to play. He can write and mix. That's the thing, there's so

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perimeter, where he is a lethal 3-point shooter.

His scoring average has increased from 12.9 points a game as a freshman, 21.3 last season, to more than 22 points this season.

Mashburn, born in New York City and raised in the Rangel Homes on 155th Street, never played at the Garden (until last December).

When Mashburn gauges the distance he has traveled since leaving New York, he measures his progress by what has taken place outside the arena. His world has now expanded to a point where proficiency in basketball isn't enough.

"Sometimes I feel that playing basketball is the only gift I have, really," he said. "I wish I could write music or play music. Basketball is not a real big thing. Something besides sports, I think, is a real talent, a gift God gave you. In sports, you can work on it and become good with hard work and talent."

Indeed, those who know Mashburn talk about how hard he has worked to change from being a pudgy playground hopeful to becoming one of the nation's leading players.

by William C. Rhoden

came up to him and wanted his autograph and wished him good luck. They said they followed his career and were happy he'd made it. That meant a lot to Jamal. He sees himself as part of the community."

Indeed, aside from becoming a pro-caliber basketball player, Mashburn's most consistent quest, as he negotiates fame, is a longing to fit in. In Lexington he is the Monster Mash, No. 24 or an all-America basketball player. He is featured on posters showing him crushing a basketball.

Trips back to New York tend to ground him in reality, help him maintain a fix on what is real and what is not.

"I know that's all part of the hype, but that's not who I am," Mashburn said. "Sometimes in Lexington, there's so much hype around basketball, you're treated in a way that can make you lose sight of reality. Back home, around my friends, I'm just Jamal. They ask me about my experiences. They want to know what it's like playing against the Dream Team or playing at Ken-

much music where I grew up. People just don't have the resources to get it out."

Perhaps a little more than he would like, trips to Harlem also help remind Mashburn that, for all the hype of his all-America career at Kentucky, in some eyes, in some environments, he is merely a potential criminal in a perpetual game of cops and robbers.

According to his family, Mashburn was stopped by the police in Harlem twice last summer — both in cases of "mistaken identity." The first time Mashburn and two friends had just picked up Glover from his job



Photos by David Coyle