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Two local basketball alum in running for Bevo Francis award

By John T. Miller



Chris Hansen drives to the basket against Cal State San Marcos in a 92-69 win on his way to 19 points and 10 rebounds for his eighth double-double of the season. Photo Derrick Tuskan, UCSD Athletics

Two Lafayette grads are in the running for the Clarence "Bevo" Francis award, given annually to the player considered to have had the best overall season within Small College Basketball.

Chris Hansen (Campolindo, '15) and Joey Hewitt (Acalanes, '15) have been named to the Bevo Award 100 Watch List. Hansen is a redshirt junior with UC San Diego, while Hewitt is in his senior season at Whitman College.

They have both had outstanding careers so far, but what makes the award announcement even more special is that the two have been friends since Merriewood Preschool. They played together at Colorados Pool, continued as classmates at Burton Valley Elementary and Stanley Middle School, before moving on to different high schools.

Hansen and Hewitt were also members of the St. Perpetua CYO team, along with Matt O'Reilly (Campolindo '15), who is finishing his basketball career at Bucknell and was the subject of an article in the Dec. 23 edition of this paper.

During the offseason and winter break, the two like to call up former teammates and play pickup ball at McKeon Pavilion on the Saint Mary's campus. "Being able to work out with another collegiate player is important during our time away from college," says Hewitt.

Hansen adds, "These games are always filled with laughs and good times as we reminisce about playing together on the same teams."

Both teams dominate

At UC San Diego, Hansen redshirted his junior season following shoulder surgery, but rebounded this year to score 15.3 points per game on 55 percent field goal shooting and 54 percent from the 3-point line while collecting 5.9 rebounds per game. His season highs include 29 points against Cal State San Bernardino and 14 rebounds versus Chico State.

With eight games remaining, the 6-foot-7 center has helped lead his team to first place in the California Collegiate Athletic Association (12-2 conference; 17-4 overall), was twice named CCAA player of the week, garnered All-Tournament honors (D2 Power Invitational and CCAA/GNAC Challenge), and was three times named UCSDTritons.com Athlete of the Week. In addition, Hansen is the team's representative on the Triton Athletes' Council.

Hewitt, a 6-foot-2 senior guard at Whitman (11-0 conference; 19-1 overall), leads the team in scoring with 15.8 ppg - 46 percent on field goals and 38 percent on 3-point shots, and averages 3.6 rebounds per game with 2.2 assists. His highest scoring game of 28 points came in The Blues only loss, a 112-109 OT shootout at Pomona Pitzer.

Hewitt was named first team All-Northwest Conference his junior year and honorable mention as a sophomore. For his senior year he was named to the D3 Hoops preseason All-American team. The fast-paced Blues have outscored their opponents by 25 points per game.

Happy to be in the game

Long before Steph Curry brought his exuberant brand of basketball to the Bay Area, the two young men from Lafayette fell in love with the game and have been playing it for fun.

"I have had such an amazing experience in college, it would be hard for me to say this will be the last time I play competitive ball," says Hansen. "It is still such a joy to me, why stop?" He looks forward to exploring options in professional basketball after graduation - perhaps worldwide - but is also secure in his eventual degree, a bachelor's in management science.

Hewitt agrees. "I fell in love with basketball playing CYO with Chris. We both found something we loved and stuck with our passion." Hewitt, who was always one of the smaller players on the court, blossomed late into his 6-foot-2 frame. He, too, would like to pursue professional basketball overseas, and is interested in a future career in sports psychology.

Both coaches raved about their local players. At Whitman, Eric Bridgeland, head coach there for 11 years, credits Hewitt with upgrading the culture of the program ever since his arrival his freshman year, saying "Joey has a joy for life and is a very positive person. He has fun and is always focused. We've never had more fun and success, and he's a big part of that."

Eric Olen, in his fifth year as UCSD coach, was equally enthusiastic. "Chris is not only a talented athlete but also a terrific teammate, hard worker and great competitor. He's had a huge impact on our program on the court helping our team to some of the most successful seasons in school history. His positive attitude and work ethic contributes to the culture of our entire program."

Who was Bevo Francis?

While Bevo Francis isn't exactly a household name like John Wooden or Magic Johnson, the little-known phenom played two seasons for Rio Grande College in Ohio and still holds the NCAA record with 48.3 points per game in 1954. At 6-foot-9, he also scored 50 points or more during 14 games of his two-year career. All this without the benefit of the 3-point line or a shot clock.

His 113 points against Hillsdale College stood as the NCAA record until eclipsed in 2012 by Grinnell's Jack Taylor's 138 points against Faith Baptist Bible.

Francis, who died in 2015, signed a \$12,000 contract with the Harlem Globetrotters to play for a barnstorming team called the Boston Whirlwinds, but stopped playing shortly afterward to support his wife and son. He spent most of his life toiling as a truck driver, steel mill worker and a tire factory worker.

Francis was posthumously inducted into the Small College Basketball Hall of Fame in 2016. The Bevo Francis Award, established in the same year, honors the best small college basketball player. Considerations are given to season statistics and individual achievements, awards, personal character and team achievements.

The finalist list will be reduced to 50 in mid-February, to 25 in March, and the award winner will be announced on April 8. Stay tuned.



Joey Hewitt, celebrating a 3-point shot, scored 24 points and added 5 rebounds, 3 steals, and 2 assists in a 110-98 victory over Whitworth. Photo Shane Prudente

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