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Jermaine Sanders builds name from Far Rockaway to Rice & beyond

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Every morning during the school year, Jermaine Sanders swipes his MetroCard and begins a near two-hour commute from his home in Far Rockaway to Harlem, where he just wrapped up his sophomore year at Rice HS.

And what does he do to pass the time on the A train?

"Listen to my iPod - Stack Bundles," said Sanders, referring to the young rapper who was shot dead outside of his building in Far Rock two years ago. "He put us on the map. I want to make it out, too."

Far Rockaway residents often refer to the neighborhood as the city's "forgotten stepchild."

Sanders, an emerging star on Rice's city- and state-champion basketball team, is on the path to making sure that his game never gets lost in the shuffle.

Just don't count on the 6-4, 195-pound swingman to tell you how good he is. The shy junior-to-be practices hard, plays harder during games and then lets others formulate an opinion.

"He is definitely going to be one of the next greats out of New York City," said Kimani Young, a former assistant at St. John's who recently returned to Bronx-based New Heights, where Sanders plays club basketball. "Right now, he's a legit Big East and ACC recruit, and he just finished his sophomore year," Young added. "It's only going to get bigger."

Longtime Rice coach Maurice Hicks also says that Sanders is developing into a special player.

"He's in that same class with all of the top players that have come out of our school," Hicks said. "He has size on him and keeps getting better and better. Sky's the limit."

Sanders, who helped Miami-bound guard Durand Scott lead Rice to the CHSAA city championship and state Federation Class AA title this past season, knows he'll have to become the Raiders' featured scorer.

To prepare for the role, Sanders has been clocking overtime this summer. He



Jermaine Sanders is practicing hard in preparation for junior season at Rice HS.

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already led New Heights to the 16-and-under championship in the Rumble in The Bronx tournament this month, and looks to keep that momentum going when he attends next week's Reebok summer camp in Philadelphia.

Sanders is a self-proclaimed gym rat, one whose coaches say they have to literally drag him out off the hardwood.

"He's a basketball junkie and he won't leave that gym before making a set number of shots," said Joel Shapiro, another New Heights coach. What's the magic number?

"I'll get to practice early and leave late, and put up 800-900 shots," Sanders said. "I start off shooting off the dribble, and then from all over the court. I want to get quicker."

That work ethic paid off in March, when Rice needed a bucket in overtime to put away pesky Newburgh Free Academy in the Federation championship game. Sanders showed his shooter's touch, coolly sinking a three-pointer.

Afterward, Sanders humbly fielded reporters' questions about the shot, but it was clear that he felt a bit uncomfortable talking about himself.

"That's him," said Lisa Stallings, his mother. "He's just a humble kid."

Humble, but confident.

Sanders understands his potential, and watching his friend Ryan Pearson, a former Christ the King standout who just finished his freshman year at George Mason, make it out of Far Rockaway only feeds his hunger.

"(Watching Pearson's ascent) meant a lot to me," Sanders said. "Everybody around here . . . people can get out. He proved it."

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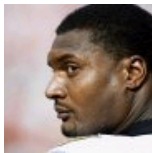
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