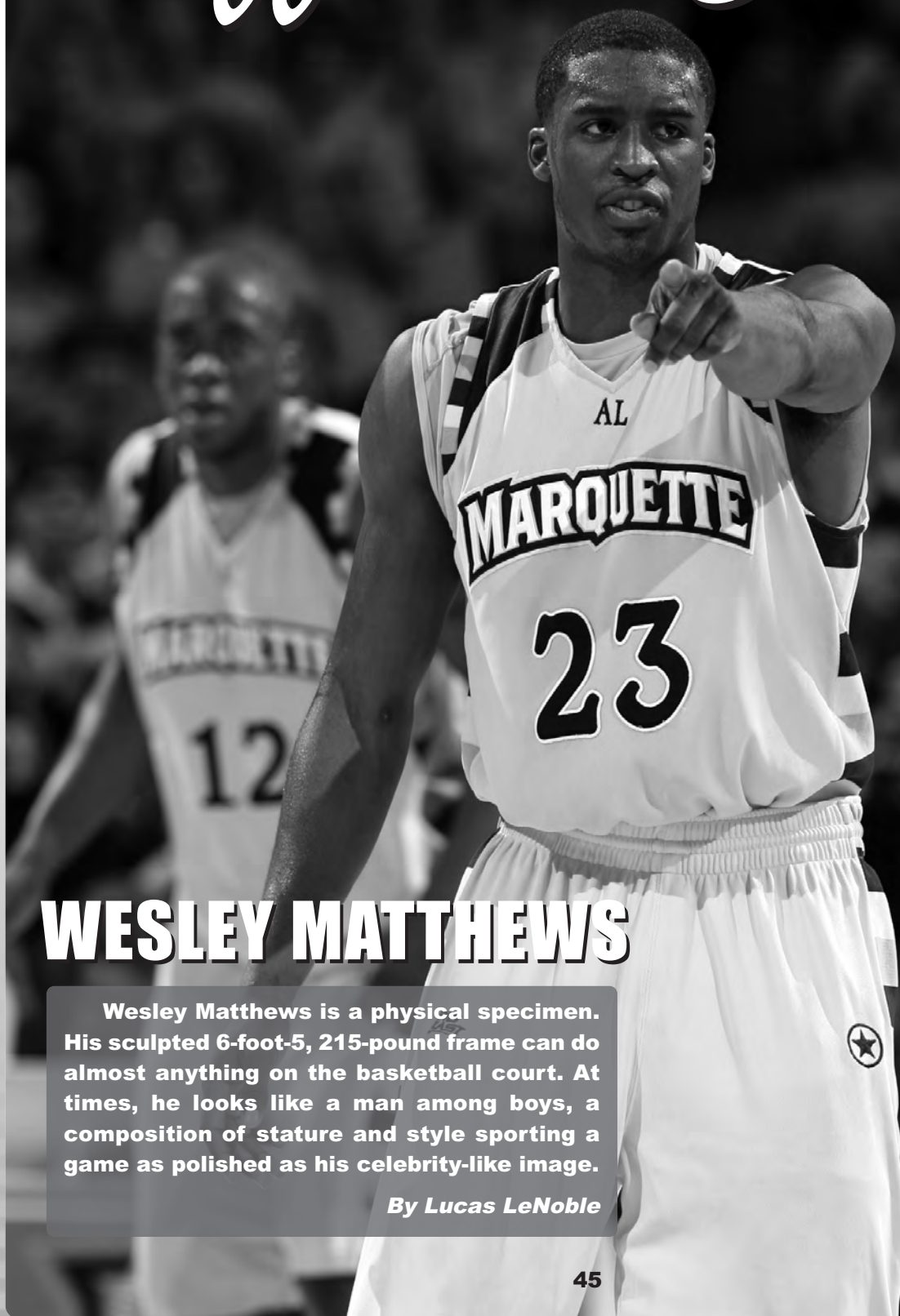


# Off the Court



## WESLEY MATTHEWS

Wesley Matthews is a physical specimen. His sculpted 6-foot-5, 215-pound frame can do almost anything on the basketball court. At times, he looks like a man among boys, a composition of stature and style sporting a game as polished as his celebrity-like image.

*By Lucas LeNoble*



Off the court, the Marquette guard carries a quiet, yet confident demeanor. He is mature beyond his years and as well-spoken as anybody on the downtown Milwaukee campus. A purebred student-athlete with looks, intellect, charm and swagger.

"My mom raised me," Matthews said with a grin. "Looking at it now, it's like she raised me for these moments. There were times when I didn't understand why she made me do things the way she did. I was a kid. I wanted to do my thing. She taught me to look people in the eye when you shake their hand and to open the door for women. Those kinds of things. I was raised by women: my mom, my grandma and my aunt."

Although it always seemed like work, meeting challenges was a response that was instilled in Matthews at an early age. Sports were important during his youth also, because winning provided a literal sense of accomplishment.

But it was through hard work that one could overcome almost any obstacle. It doesn't matter what motivates you. Some are more motivated more than others and for different reasons.

Matthews is driven by one thing -- success.

"If you're not used to winning, if you're not accustomed to winning, then you don't develop that itch for winning," Matthews said. "To a competitor, winning is like a drug. You want it. You want it bad and you do whatever it takes to get it."

It doesn't have to be his own personal success. In fact, Matthews was careful not to command too much of the spotlight as the reigning Mr. Basketball in the state of Wisconsin coming out of high school, because overall it was the team's success that was most important. (Marquette is 70-25 with Matthews in the starting lineup).

"Winning was all I knew, even when I played soccer," said Matthews. "Playing in elementary school on the play-



grounds. That's all you had as a kid, was to say 'I beat you.' That's where the drive originally came from."

From the playgrounds of elementary school to the fieldhouse at James Madison Memorial High School, where Matthews led the Spartans to a WIAA state championship his senior season after his team posted a 24-2 record, Matthews has been working at a grueling pace to get to the next level. So far, that effort has culminated in over 1,000 points and 500 rebounds in his short career with the Blue and Gold.

"I've been just so happy with winning that you haven't really seen the full Wesley as a player on the court," said Matthews. "I haven't felt limited, but there were certain times where I guess I've had to pick and choose and fall back as a player and fill a role, which was fine with me because of the success we were having."

Now, Matthews is one of three senior guards, along with teammates Dominique James and Jerel McNeal, primed to put the exclamation point on

their shared legacy in their final season with the Golden Eagles. Matthews has elevated his game to a new level. Through 13 contests thus far in 2008-09, Matthews has been the team's leading scorer averaging a touch over 19 points per outing, nearly eight point better than last season.

"That's just me being aggressive, me being like me," said Matthews. "When the three of us are at our best, it's going to be hard for anybody to single-handedly match up one-on-one and guard us. Especially in this new offense that gets us in spots where we're at our best."

Although he's enjoyed an increased scoring role, there's always his family and his head coach to keep him grounded. Matthews knows there are more important things in life than putting a ball through a hoop. But it's through the game that he's learned what you can gain through hard work, and it is basketball that continues to scratch that "itch" in his inner soul.

"Family is my priority and basketball is the way that I can take care of it and

"I'll have my degree as back up," said Matthews. "We haven't made it as far as we want to, but we're working."

Back to that simple mantra. Hard work. It's the only way to get the most out of life, according to Matthews. That's why it was a perfect fit then when Buzz Williams was named head coach of the Golden Eagles this past offseason. Williams' blue-collar, lunch pail approach adapts the same philosophy.

"Everything he does is about work ethic," Matthews said of Williams. "Take care of your business and be the best you can be everyday, because that's what life is. In life you have to get up and go work every single day to be successful. We have to be prepared to be men and as future husbands to be able to take care of what's important to us."

So what exactly does the future hold for Matthews? Well, hopefully basketball is in the mix as Matthews eyes a potential professional career. But where?

"The goal is to be in the [United] States," Matthews said, non-verbally speaking of the NBA. "I'm not looking forward. You hear people talking and people try to call you. But your mind just has to be on where you are now. You can't do anything about next year if you don't take care of you business today, then the next day. I know that sounds like Buzz, but that's the truth. I know where I want to be, but I can't be there right now. [Marquette] is where I want to be right now."

Basketball is just a part of life for the time being says Matthews, who hopes to get eight or nine years max out of his body. But the hard work will not stop once he's done playing the game.

"I want to be a winner. But above being a winner, I want to be remembered as a successful man," he said. "He handled his business for his family. And he's doing it. He's getting the job done."

