

## THE CITADEL'S MARSHALL HARRIS KNOWS WHAT – AND WHOM - HE'S PLAYING FOR

By Danny Reed

A popular ad campaign for a well-known insurance agency chronicles the exploits of the Paul brothers and how they assist others: real-life Chris is one of the top point guards in the world known for expertly setting up his teammates, while fictitious Cliff helps people with auto, home and life troubles.

Imagine if the twain converged. The Citadel's Marshall Harris turns imagination into reality.

On the hardwood, the Bulldogs senior point guard owns the fourth most assists in school history and set the single-game school record with 12 assists last season against Georgia Southern.

Off the hardwood, Harris is a devout Christian fresh off one of the most selfless and influential experiences of his life – a basketball mission trip to Guatemala through Athletes in Action (AIA), an organization that uses sports as a platform to spread the Word of God and provide faith-based testimonials.

The idea for Harris to get involved with AIA came from The Citadel's head coach Chuck Driesell, a man of faith himself who comes from a religious family. His sister Pam is the senior pastor at Trinity Presbyterian Church in Atlanta.

"Coach Driesell introduced me to what AIA was, and he thought it would be really good for me," said Harris.

After some thought, Harris had enough faith in himself to get involved.

"Reading the Bible and having a set of standards to live by have benefited me from the beginning," Harris added. "Especially in basketball, you can't get caught up in individual success. You have to know what you are playing for."

Community service involvement has always been a central part of Marshall Harris' life. A business administration major, he served as a YMCA Children's Supervisor in the summer of 2012. That October, the San Antonio native led a discussion with elementary school children on the topic of "Heroes in Everyday Life" and assisted them with their own classroom presentations.

The Guatemala experience, though, was a horse of a different color – not even on the same palette.

"I was born in England, but outside of going to Canada last summer for basketball, I've never been out of the country," Harris said in a matter-of-fact way.

Before exiting the United States, Harris first had to head to Xenia, Ohio – about 20 miles outside of Dayton – for an AIA five-day training camp from July 6-10 for basketball preparation and for basic orientation to the program.

Harris' travel team consisted of college players from New York to California, from Division I to NAIA schools. While the globe separated them, faith and basketball brought them together. But Harris found out how actually small the world can be.

It was at the house of the team's host family that he joined a casual card game that included teammate Chris Hampton of Nyack College – a Division II liberal arts school in Nyack, N.Y. – and quickly learned more about himself.

"We started talking, and Chris mentioned he was from New York originally," said Harris. "It turned out that he grew up in the same area that my father did, almost in the same exact neighborhood. It was pretty crazy."

While the team had to bond over a relatively brief amount of time, their abilities – basketball and religion – would be unquestionably tested in a game at the nearby Lebanon Correctional Institution against its inmates.

“It was an experience that not too many people will ever have,” Harris said. “It was a very different environment, but it still came down to the fact that it’s a game. It’s a way you can escape reality while still providing them with a valuable message of faith.”

When it finally came time for the nearly 2,700-mile trek to Guatemala for a 12-day mission trip in the heart of Central America, the focus and goals were clear, but the emotions of seeing a new place and a soaking in a new culture were thick and understandable for Marshall Harris.

“I wanted to see everything at once. Everything was so different,” Harris said with eyes as wide as saucers. “It was a culture shock...seeing the narrow streets, a family of four on one moped, dead dogs laying on the side. It made me eager to get started.”

The journey saw nine different cities over the course of 12 days with the team staying in a different locale practically each night.

“Sometimes we stayed in hotels, sometimes we stayed with host families,” Harris said. “You had to bring your own toilet paper for the restroom, there was no A/C. It made me very thankful for what I had at home.”

A typical day for Harris certainly would not qualify under the layperson’s definition of typical. More often than not, the team would be abruptly awoken at 5 a.m. to the sound of loud music and firecrackers, which is a Guatemalan birthday tradition.

After the “wake-up call”, an authentic Guatemalan meal of fried plantains, eggs and beans followed, then the team boarded the bus for the day’s activities. The bus rides were no picnic, sometimes lasting for as long as seven hours to get to the day’s site.

Once the bus ride concluded, the team would hold clinics for children ages 6-15, schooling them on faith and basketball. Each clinic featured player testimonials on the impact that God has had on their lives.

Harris – just like his teammates – emphasized playing for an “Audience of One.”

“When you are playing on the court, you don’t have to worry about playing for certain people to get their approval,” Harris said. “God is going to approve of who you are and accepts you for who you are.”

When time allowed, the team would explore other recreational routes. Some players swam. Others visited Plaza Magdalena, a shopping mall in the city of Coban.

Harris went zip-lining. With his eyes closed.

“I don’t do well with heights,” he let out while shaking his head. “It was part of the experience though.”

The day would conclude with a game against the city or village’s local club team. Harris performed quite well, averaging 16 points per game over the tour.

Focusing on that part of the trip would diminish and likely negate the overall purpose for the Guatemala mission trip.

Marshall Harris established and maintained his perspective. It’s a lesson that will never leave him.

“I struggle to play as well as I can, and I’m very hard on myself,” he said. “The trip made me more comfortable on the court and helped me realize that I am playing for God. That’s the biggest takeaway I could have.”