

Sagemont Alumni Hold Court in the NCAA

BY STACEY BOMSER

The Sagemont School is a basketball powerhouse. The team has won two State Championships, most recently in 2014. The Lions also have many former players now playing at the collegiate level, including two Class of 2015 graduates who are quickly making names for themselves in the NCAA: A.J. Jurko, who is playing for the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and Prince Ali, who is playing for UCLA.

Adam Ross, Sagemont's Head Basketball Coach, says he is incredibly proud of his players. "I'm so fortunate to have had a front row seat to witness A.J.'s and Prince's journey and now watch them realize their dream."

As impressive as A.J. Jurko and Prince Ali are on the court, Coach Ross says his fondest memories are off the court. "They're both such amazing kids. Prince has a magnetic personality. If you know Prince, you love Prince. He's certainly a dynamic athlete, but a more dynamic human being. A.J. is a once in a lifetime kind of kid. What I mean is, I may coach for 40 more years and I doubt very much that I'll get to coach another A.J. Jurko. He's a unicorn. In 2014, during our State Championship ring ceremony, I told the crowd that A.J. was the kind of kid that you'd want your daughter to marry. That sums it up. He has every reason in the world to be arrogant and brash. Meanwhile, he's as humble an 18-year-old you'll ever meet... completely comfortable in his own skin and completely selfless. It's enviable."

A.J. and Prince aren't the only Sagemont alumni to play at the collegiate level. Two of their former classmates are also playing for college teams this year. Keyshawn Evans is at Illinois State, and Stefan Britvar plays for Oglethorpe University.

Coach Ross says Sagemont has had three dozen students go on to play NCAA basketball, and the large majority of them have been successful. "They've all done well academically and not at third tier schools either. We're talking places like MIT, UCLA, Columbia, Penn, Brandeis, Rice, Richmond, etc."

Coach Ross believes Sagemont players are often recruited by college scouts because they "know that they're going to get a player that is prepared to succeed in college both academically and athletically."

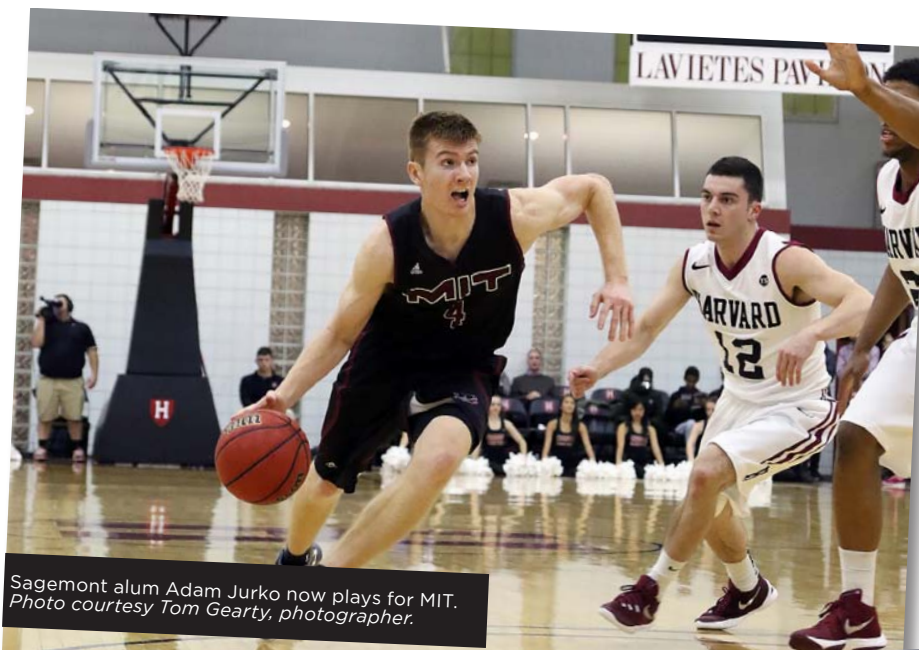
A.J. and Prince will soon be joined in the NCAA by some of their former teammates. Senior Nik Popovic has signed with Boston College. Coach Ross says two other seniors, Nick DeFeria and Dwayne Frazier, will play at high academic D3 programs.

"We have three juniors and a sophomore that are all being recruited at the Division 1 level," adds Coach Ross. "This is a very talented group."

The team showed its strength at the Tarkanian Classic basketball tournament in Las Vegas in December, where the Lions made it to the semi-finals. "We foster a hyper-competitive environment that raises the level of each player which, in turn, raises our program's ability to compete with the best high school teams in America," explains Coach Ross. "We have a group of kids that all have the same goals. That has proven to be a great thing."

Coach Ross, who is now in his 11th season at Sagemont, his 8th as Head Coach, offers a unique coaching philosophy. "Coaching is much more than X's and O's. It's about cultivating a culture. I'd like to think we've created a culture that breeds success, meaning our guys enjoy playing for me and enjoy playing at Sagemont. That allows us to practice hard and play hard, but, most of all, enjoy the experience of being a high school basketball team."

When asked what he considers to be the highlight of his career, Coach Ross reflects on his players' success. "Our players have earned literally millions of dollars in college scholarship money. That's the highlight. Big wins and State Championships are really fun but they don't impact lives like those college scholarships do."



Sagemont alum Adam Jurko now plays for MIT.
Photo courtesy Tom Gearty, photographer.



The Sagemont Varsity Boys Basketball team was invited to play at the Tarkanian Classic basketball tournament in Las Vegas.



Sagemont alum Prince Ali now plays for UCLA.
Photo courtesy Scott Chandler/UCLA Athletics.