

Bobby Lazor, '94



Although 15 years removed from Bobby Lazor's birth in 1976 and Ricky Nelson's top-selling single 'Travelin' Man' in 1961, there are similarities between Lazor's life and that of Nelson's protagonist, known for his sojourning ways. As the opening line to Nelson's ditty notes, "I'm a travelin' man, made a lot of stops all over the world . . ." That,

in essence, could be Lazor's anthem, too. But while Nelson's wayfaring hero of song was winning the hearts of girls to and fro, Lazor was dazzling basketball aficionados on three continents—Asia, Europe and North America.

Born in Phoenix, Bobby was four years old when his family moved to Norwich in 1980. Norwich would continue to be their home for the next 14 years, until Bobby matriculated at Syracuse University, while his family relocated to Cincinnati. After two years at Syracuse, Lazor transferred to Arizona State University in Tempe, while his family picked up roots again and headed to Rio Verde, just northeast of Scottsdale. Following an exceptional two years with the Sun Devils, Bobby was on the move once more as he began a nine-year professional career that would touch down on those aforementioned three continents. In Asia, he played for teams in Japan and South Korea, while suiting up for European clubs in France, Germany and Italy. His North American stopovers included Puerto Rico and a pair of CBA (Continental Basketball Association) stints in Albuquerque, NM and Bismarck, ND. By now I think you get the picture – Lazor was indeed a world traveler when it came to his time on the hardwoods. And when his career ended in 2008, he hung his hat in Gilbert, AZ, a fast-growing community southeast of Phoenix. He has come full circle back to his roots, where appropriately enough he is a licensed real estate salesman. But it is his longest stint anywhere – Norwich – that has earned him a spot in the Norwich High School Sports Hall of Fame as a member of its third induction class.

As a Tornado cager, Lazor established himself as the all-time scoring leader (1,444 points), rebounder (720) and shot blocker (173), while during his three-year varsity career Norwich won back-to-back NYSPHSAA (New

York State Public High School Athletic Association) Class B titles and one Federation Class B championship in going a gaudy 72-7 (.911) between 1991-94.

"Bobby showed the uncanny ability to post up in the paint on one trip down the court and then come back to knock down a 20-footer the next," recalled former NHS coach Mark Abbott. "He could see the floor well and hit the open man for a bucket. He also swatted away an-almost-countless number of opponents' shots. "Scoring was more an afterthought for him in the beginning. We were most interested in his rebounding and shot blocking then. But he really diversified his game over the three years he played. Despite all of this, he'll likely be remembered 50 years from now for those high-percentage shots of his – the thunderous slam dunks." Indeed! Lazor is also the all-time Norwich leader in two-point field goals with 497, and his 615 points as a senior and 586 as a junior rank him one-two in seasonal scoring statistics. And it was during those two seasons that the Purple captured those aforementioned state titles in going 29-0 and 27-2, respectively, during his junior and senior seasons. As a sophomore, he scored 241 points as Norwich went 16-5.

"Physically I became much stronger between my sophomore and junior years," noted the 6-foot, 9-inch Lazor when queried about how his game developed. "I grew about three inches, but more importantly I grew into my body. I was never very fast, but I became quicker and more athletic." Without exception, Norwich and Lazor had their greatest success during the back-to-back campaigns of 1992-93 and 1993-94. During that stretch, the Purple won 37 straight games and a whopping 46 in a row versus Section IV clubs.

Lazor, meanwhile, rang up double-digit scoring numbers in 54 of the Tornado's 58 games during that stretch, with his 34 in a 72-57 triumph over Binghamton on Dec. 27, 1993 not only being his career single-game best but an outburst that allowed him to eclipse the 1,000-point plateau. On seven other occasions he passed the 30-point mark, too, but it was his 32 markers in a 72-55 victory over Nyack that made Lazor stop and think.

"They (Nyack) were really on us before the game," recalled Lazor of the Region I championship contest at Marist College in Poughkeepsie. "You could tell they didn't think we had much. But we came out and ran them off the court. It was a pretty good half of basketball."

Pretty good, huh. How good is a 44-17 lead at halftime over a club that had lost only one meaningless game by two points? And leading the way were Lazor's 32, which

included nine two-point field goals, three long-range trifectas and a 5-for-7 effort from the charity stripe.

Accomplishing such feats brings with it individual accolades, and Lazor amassed a truckload. Twice he was named Player of the Year by the New York State Sportswriters' Association as a first-team state selection. As a junior he was voted MVP of both the NYSPHSAA and Federation games, and he was an All-Metro, STAC All-Conference and All-County pick two years running. "All of Bobby's success was attributable to the time he spent on basketball, whether playing it, watching it or talking about it," opined former Tornado head man Abbott. "I remember him in sixth grade. He was tall then and I hoped that he'd develop into the player that he ultimately became."

Much of that success can be attributed to his father, Bob, whether through genetics or mentoring. Like his son, the elder Lazor was an outstanding cager. As a player at the University of Pittsburgh, he became the first Panther player to reach 1,000 points with a career 1,175 total. That success earned him being drafted by the Detroit Pistons, their first year in the Motor City after relocating from Fort Wayne.

"My father's influence was huge," praised Bobby. "I always liked the game, but it took me awhile to get good at it. Both my father and mother (Norma) would attend my games and my mom would videotape all of them. Afterwards, my

father and I would have some interesting conversations. We'd argue over how good or bad I did, but he helped me a lot." Coincidentally, Bobby wound up his college career with 1,173 points, two shy of his dad's collegiate sum. "I never knew I was that close to his point total," said Bobby. "But, no matter what, he was better because he scored his in three years, while it took me four."

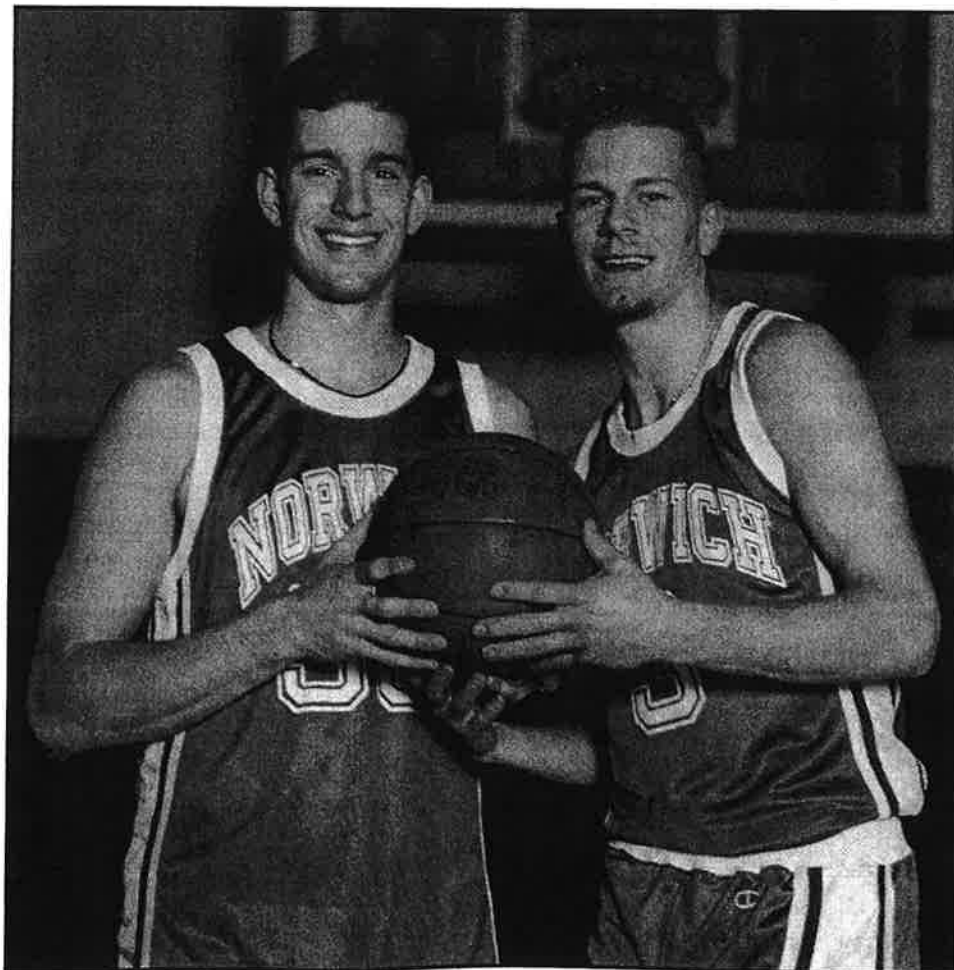
It may have taken Bobby four years, due in large part to his limited playing time at Syracuse, but once he headed west to ASU, he blossomed. Having started all 62 games in his Sun Devil career, he set the ASU record for points scored (1,077) and free throws made (283) by a two-year player. In fact, he was the first two-year player in school history to notch 1,000 points.

While a senior, he earned All-Pac 10 honors as he ended the season fourth in the conference in scoring (18 ppg) and sixth in rebounding (8.7 rpg). One of the top student-athletes in all of college athletics in 1998-99 as he was named the Playboy Anson Mount Scholar-Athlete of the Year in its preseason issue, Bobby went on to earn Academic All-America First Team honors during that senior campaign. An honorable mention all-league pick his junior year, Bobby was tabbed the Pac-10 Newcomer of the Year. With the rigors of competitive basketball behind him, Lazor splits his time between his family and the real estate

profession. And that family consists of his wife, the former Danielle Batchelor – a 1993 NHS grad – and two sons, five-year-old Makenzie and four-year-old Maddox.

"I still find time to play a little," said Bobby of his basketball life circa 2013. "It's not that frequently, but when I do there are some good games at the local YMCA. There are some pretty good young players involved, too." As they say, it takes one to know one, especially for someone who has traveled the globe as extensively as Lazor in search of his hoop dreams. One can only wonder whether a few of those budding players can achieve the success that Bobby Lazor has in his young 37 years.

—Tom Rowe



Two Hall-of-Famers—Bobby and Charlie, Evening Sun Co-players of the Year 1993-1994.