

Nembhard brothers Andrew and Ryan make NBA and NCAA hardcourt history



It doesn't get much better than the on-court events of last week for Aurora resident and Vice President of Ontario Basketball Claude Nembhard. His Aurora-raised sons Andrew and Ryan had historic weeks on the hardcourt and raised the profile of Canadian basketball with their sublime efforts in Toronto and Louisville, respectively.

In fact, Andrew of the Indiana Pacers and Ryan of the Creighton University Blue Jays made NBA and NCAA history within days of one another in nationally-televised broadcasts of Raptors Basketball and March Madness.

Andrew was in the starting lineup for the Indiana Pacers ? along with fellow Canadians Benjamin Mathurin and Oshae Brissett ? to take on the Toronto Raptors last Wednesday at Scotiabank Arena.

It was the first time in NBA history that three Canadians started a game for the same team.

Andrew's heroics in his homecoming made this historical start by the Canadian trio a memorable one.

The 6'5" point guard did not disappoint his legion of fans assembled at the Bay Street arena. Showing the same poise and scoring ability that has been characteristic of his rookie season with the Pacers and even more reminiscent of his stellar play with the NCAA Gonzaga Bulldogs, Nembhard lit up the Raptors for 25 points and 10 assists in a 118-114 Indiana victory versus ?Canada's Team.?

His Canadian teammates, Mathurin and Brissett, contributed 15 and 9 points, respectively, to the victory, but it was Nembhard who figured prominently down the stretch in the young Pacers' big road win.

The Aurora-born backcourt whiz hit a big three-ball to put the Pacers up by seven with less than 90 seconds to play and ostensibly turned out the lights on the Raptors, much as he did earlier in the season when he hit a last-second 3-ball over LeBron James to sink the Lakers on national television.

Nembhard's double-double was an extra thrill for the 200 friends and family that he provided tickets for and with whom he bonded in Section 110 after his media commitments. The magical post-game moment was not lost on his St. Jerome Elementary School teacher and basketball coach Glenn Reid who, with his son, were in attendance as Andrew's guests.

?He was so very humble with us after the game. Andrew was proud of what he had accomplished on the court, but he embraced my son and treated all 200 of us with so much respect. He's respected the game, his opponents, his coaches, his teammates, and his fans since he was in elementary school at St. Jerome.?

Andrew's father, Claude, also attended the game with his wife, Mary, and observed the historical moment for Canadian basketball spearheaded by his son's fine play.

?It's great to see these things happening for Canadian kids like Ben, Andrew, and Oshae. I've coached a lot of them and Rowan Barrett has done such a nice job raising the standards of the Canadian basketball program.?

He also acknowledged Pacers' coach Rick Carlisle for ?starting the three on purpose in front of so many family members and friends. Andrew, for example, has rarely had the chance to play at home so credit has to go to Coach Carlisle, too. He's ?good people'.

The VP of Basketball Ontario also credited Carlisle for speeding up his son's defensive development in the NBA.

?It's been great. Coach [Carlisle] has him playing against the other team's best players every night. It's been amazing to have this many minutes in his rookie season and to have these opportunities with the Pacers. Minutes were available on a young team and he's started 60 games. As a result, Andrew's been confident all season.?

Claude's younger son, Ryan, has also shown a high degree of confidence on the court this season with NCAA Division 1 Creighton University. Two days after his older brother dismantled the Raptors, Ryan made his own kind of sweet history on Friday night during the March Madness College Basketball tournament.

The sophomore guard quarterbacked the Creighton Blue Jays past the Princeton Tigers 86-75 to earn his school's first trip to the NCAA Elite Eight. He contributed a productive 9-point, 4-rebound, and 8 assist performance to the historic Blue Jays victory. Prior to beating the Tigers, the speedy guard played the best game of his collegiate career by putting together a brilliant 30-point performance to upset third-seeded Baylor 85-76 and eliminate the Bears from the South Regional.

Claude, while travelling down to Louisville, Kentucky to see Ryan play in the South Regional semifinal versus the San Diego State Aztecs, offered insights into his younger son's outstanding performances in March.

?He's seen his brother play in The Tournament and he wants to do well. He's very confident right now and has bounced back from last year's injury that kept him out of the 2022 Tournament. He was the Big Eight's Freshman of the Year in 2022 and that has helped him in his second year at Creighton.?

In a key father-son moment last week, Claude disclosed to Ryan that he would have to have a ?big game as a point guard during one of the opening contests if the Blue Jays were to advance in the tournament.?

The dutiful son complied with his prophetic father's wishes with an emphatic 30-2-2-2 performance to advance Creighton to the Sweet 16.

In the final three games of Creighton's playoff season, Ryan has experienced the range of emotion available at the March Madness tournament?the ecstasy of having a career-best performance versus Baylor and impelling his Creighton Blue Jays into the Elite 8 for the first time in the school's history with a historical win over Princeton, but he's also felt the agony of coming up one point short of qualifying for the NCAA Final Four in Creighton's last-second 57-56 loss to San Diego State on Sunday afternoon.

The Blue Jays finished their NCAA tournament with the school's best-ever NCAA tournament record at 3-1, something for Creighton and Andrew Nembhard to build upon in 2023-24.

Reveling in these hardcourt feats are the Nembhards' proud Aurora elementary school basketball coaches who feel fortunate to have coached and taught both Andrew and Ryan at St. Jerome. Glenn Reid and Tony Pecchia are veteran teachers and coaches at the north-end school who reflected on the big week for their former student-athletes.

Pecchia noted that Andrew and Ryan were "great in and out of the classroom, work was done even if they were away for AAU tournaments, and they were strong academically" straight-A students. At St. Jerome, many of the pennants we fly in our gym are due to their excellence as athletes. They played five sports as Lions: Basketball, Soccer, Volleyball, Cross Country, and Track.

Reid echoed his colleague's assessment, adding that "both Andrew and Ryan were such great passers that they would always find their open teammates and give them chances to score. They were such great team players. They made the guys work harder and get better. Ryan and Andrew scored their share, too. I remember when Andrew was in Grade 1 and he played in a junior game for us and scored 19 of our team's 19 points in a 21-19 loss. People in the gym were lined along the walls to see him play. He was phenomenal then and he was phenomenal against the Raptors on Wednesday night."

It was, indeed, a week of significant accomplishments by two home-grown Aurora student-athletes on the grand stages of the NBA and NCAA.

Notes:

In his rookie season with the NBA Indiana Pacers, Andrew Nembhard has played 68 games; he is averaging 8.9 PPG, 2.6 RPG, 4.1 APG, and 27.2 MIN/G. His FG% is 43.7%.

In his sophomore season with NCAA D1 Creighton Blue Jays, Ryan Nembhard played 37 games and averaged 10.5 PPG, 4.0 RPG, 4.8 APG, and 34.0 MIN/G. His FG% was 43.2% and FT% was 87.1%. Ryan guided the Blue Jays to a .750 winning percentage at this year's NCAA Tournament—the best Creighton outcome in the Omaha, Nebraska school's history—with wins over North Carolina State, Baylor, and Princeton.

By Jim Stewart