



ASCENT.

Former Hoosier Victor Oladipo has become an NBA All-Star after emerging as a superstar for the Indiana Pacers this season.

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It was the senior night he never had.

Just days removed from being named an NBA All-Star for the first time, IU alum and Indiana Pacers guard Victor Oladipo made his homecoming to Simon Skjodt Assembly Hall.

Oladipo returned to be honored for the first time since he endeared himself to Hoosier fans with his dazzling dunks and relentless defense during his three years at IU.

Before IU faced Purdue on Jan. 28, IU Athletics Director Fred Glass presented Oladipo with a framed cream and crimson No. 4 jersey. As Glass held the framed jersey high in the air and turned around to make sure everyone could see it, Oladipo looked up with his beaming smile.

The crowd, which had nearly drowned out his introduction by public address announcer Chuck Crabb, was standing and cheering as if Oladipo had just thrown down one of his trademark dunks. He took in the moment before briefly addressing the adoring fans.

“I’m a Hoosier,” Oladipo said. “I’ll always be a Hoosier. I just want to thank you all for the three amazing years I spent here, unforgettable moments in this arena. I’m just glad to be back. Let’s go beat Purdue.”

Oladipo — a Hoosier legend who was part of two Sweet 16 appearances and a regular season Big Ten Championship team — finally returned home. He sat and watched the game courtside as a fan, chirping at the officials and imploring the Hoosiers to pull off the upset. Situated across from the IU bench, he saw the game from a whole new perspective.

He wouldn’t forget this experience.

From being a little-known high school recruit to carrying the Indiana Pacers, Oladipo blazed an unlikely trail. On the way there, he’s captured the heart of a basketball-crazed state.

workout and practice his team had. When he was healthy enough, he rebounded for teammates and was willing to even clean the gym.

No matter what, he was there because he didn’t want his coaches to forget about him.

“He was not someone you said was a natural in terms of the player he was then,” DeMatha Coach Mike Jones said. “The work he put in, the commitment he made to improve as a basketball player was second to none. He just always had that drive to be the best he could possibly be.”

Working his way up from the DeMatha freshman team, Oladipo would play three seasons on varsity, starting only in his senior season. As a junior, Oladipo was willing to come off the bench, instead of starting, because the roster featured future NBA players Jerian and Jerami Grant and Quinn Cook.

His selflessness was rewarded.

As a senior, Oladipo joined the starting lineup and led DeMatha to a City Championship and a 32-4 record. His numbers weren’t eye-popping — 11.9 points per game and 10.3 rebounds per game — but Jones said his legacy was as someone that was going to succeed, no matter what he did.

Oladipo didn’t attract as much recruiting buzz, but he caught the eye of former IU Coach Tom Crean because of his personality. Crean said he liked how Oladipo interacted with his teammates and his coaches before Crean had even met him.

He also loved the defensive intensity Oladipo brought to the court.

“I loved his energy on the court,” Crean said. “I didn’t think when I watched him that he was interested in being a good defender, I thought he was determined to be a great defender. There’s a difference. Some guys will play defense, some guys like to play defense, but some guys absolutely love it and he loved it.”

Oladipo complemented his defensive aptitude with explosion and upside on offense. Crean said he liked Oladipo’s character and thought he had a strong chance of developing.

The character Crean saw in Oladipo helped him when he joined the IU program.

His first summer in Bloomington, Oladipo and former IU forward Will Sheehy worked to establish a new identity for the team. Both brought a dedication to improvement with them, and they helped drive others to put in the necessary work.

“He didn’t have any entitlement which is really rare in this day and age,” Crean said. “There was nothing about him that made you think that he had anything figured out. He really wanted to learn, he really wanted to win and loved to be in the gym.”

IDS FILE PHOTO
Then-junior guard Victor Oladipo jumps to make a basket during IU’s 58-52 win against Temple on at the University of Dayton Arena on March 24, 2013.

During his freshman season at IU, Oladipo started five games and averaged just over seven points per game, but the Hoosiers went 12-20. The tide would start to change for the program once current Charlotte Hornets forward Cody Zeller arrived in the summer of 2011. In Oladipo, Zeller found his competitive match.

“Coach Crean would put Vic and I on separate teams because he knew we would bring out the best in each other,” Zeller said. “Neither one of us was going to back down no matter if it was in the weight room or the practice court, we even fired each other up during games. He’s just a competitive guy.”

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Victor Oladipo

The duo, which would revitalize the program, competed against each other daily during the two years they played together, whether it was on the court, in the weight room or even in the classroom. After Oladipo improved on both ends of the floor before his sophomore season, the Hoosiers would make it to the Sweet 16 with the fruits of the rebuild paying off.

Zeller and Oladipo would return for another season, this time leading the team to start as the AP preseason No. 1. The Hoosiers won the regular season Big Ten Championship but got upset in the Sweet 16 by Syracuse.

Oladipo — who started all 36 games that season and averaged 13.6 points per game — was named the 2013 National Defensive Player of the Year and the Sporting News Men’s College Basketball Player of the Year.

No player worked as hard as Oladipo did at IU. Crean said there were only two days he could remember that Oladipo wasn’t in the gym working on his game. One time, Crean even had to hide the basketballs to keep him from overworking himself.

From lightly recruited to becoming one of the best players in college basketball, Oladipo would leave for the NBA following his junior season.

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His path back to the state of In-

SEE OLADIPO, PAGE 10

Victor Oladipo

2017-18 stats

24.3 points per game

23.7 - Player Efficiency Rating
(average is 15 for an IUBB player)

30.4 - Usage percentage

Oladipo is a humble superstar, just trying to outwork everyone else. He’s always been that way, dating back to the beginning of his career.

Before his sophomore season at basketball powerhouse DeMatha High School in Hyattsville, Maryland, Oladipo missed nearly the entire summer of workouts due to an injury. However, he remained present for nearly every single

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