

Let's hope Paige stays in school

Written by Jim Ecker

Monday, 08 December 2014 18:52 -



Doug McDermott set a terrific example for college basketball players last season when he postponed his entry into the NBA draft and returned to Creighton for his senior year with the Bluejays.

Let's hope Marcus Paige does the same thing and returns to North Carolina next season for his senior year with the Tar Heels.

McDermott was a first team All-American at Creighton as a junior and undoubtedly would have been a first-round NBA draft pick that year, but he decided to stay in school and wait another year before raking in millions of dollars in the pros with the Chicago Bulls.

McDermott's situation was a little different because he was playing for his father, Greg, at Creighton and had his family to consider, but he made the right choice and stayed in school.

Paige should as well.

Paige was a second team All-American at North Carolina last season as a sophomore and is considered one of the top point guards in the country. He was the leading vote-getting on the AP preseason All-American team this year and a likely first-round draft pick if he turns pro after the season.

He also was a first team All-American this year on the preseason squads picked by Sports Illustrated, The Sporting News, USA Today and Blue Ribbon.

Paige is also an excellent student, a 4.0 student at Linn-Mar High School and a second team Academic All-American at North Carolina last year. North Carolina's name has been dragged through the mud this year due to some bogus academic classes, but Paige is a legitimate

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student who has always
in his work in the classroom.

taken pride

Paige is a journalism and mass communications major at North Carolina. And although he could always return to North Carolina at some point and get his degree after he begins his NBA career, it would send a terrific message to young basketball players all over the country if he stays in school and postpones his pro career for a year.

It also would help North Carolina clean up its tarnished image as a basketball power that features legitimate student-athletes, although Paige cannot accomplish all that by himself.

It's easy to sit here and say Paige should stay in school and forego a ton of money. He could return to North Carolina next year and blow out his knee and have little to show for it in terms of cold cash, except for perhaps an insurance policy.

But Paige could be hailed as an example of what's right about college athletics if he comes back. He's already done a fine job of that, but another year could enhance his status as one of the all-time best.

McDermott did it and finished his career as one of the leading scorers in NCAA history. Paige, who is currently sitting at 994 career points, could make a run at 2,000 points if he sticks with the Tar Heels next season.

It will be interesting to see what happens.