

Stop the rumors: Paige signs with Tar Heels

Written by Jim Ecker

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Marcus Paige heard the rumors this fall, just like everyone else.

They began after Adam Woodbury and Mike Gesell, two of his buddies on the All-Iowa Attack AAU basketball team, committed to play at the University of Iowa.

"I definitely heard it," Paige said Wednesday afternoon. "Adam Woodbury and Gesell are two of my best friends, and when they committed to Iowa the buzz started that I was considering Iowa. That wasn't true."

The rumors can officially end now. Paige signed his national letter-of-intent with North Carolina on Wednesday, honoring the commitment he made to Tar Heels Coach Roy Williams last January.

"My commitment was solid all the way through," he said.

Paige got his first Division I scholarship offer in June of 2008, shortly after finishing the eighth grade. That offer came from Ben Jacobson at the University of Northern Iowa.

Paige got his second offer the very next day, from then-Iowa State coach Greg McDermott, so he had two offers before he began the ninth grade at Linn-Mar High School.

"It was apparent at an early age that Marcus was going to be a special player," said Linn-Mar Coach Chris Robertson, who put Paige in his starting lineup as a freshman.

Before long, many of the top college basketball programs in the country were chasing the lithe point guard.

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"The who's who of coaches were here," said Robertson, ticking off North Carolina, Kansas, UCLA, Stanford, Iowa, UNI and others. "You name it, the heavy hitters were here."

Paige visited North Carolina last fall and fell in love.

"The weeks following the visit, I kept getting a better and better feel for North Carolina," he said. "My relationship with Coach Coach Williams was pretty strong at that point already."

Paige originally said he'd wait until after the 2010-11 basketball season to make a decision, but instead made the announcement when the Lions were in Minneapolis for a basketball event in early January.

"When it felt right, I didn't see any reason to wait," he said. "I knew the decision was going to be the right one and I stuck with it all the way."

Paige wore a North Carolina T-shirt Wednesday.

"Growing up, I've always loved North Carolina," he said. "I've been a huge fan my whole life. Having this opportunity means the world to me."

His life became a lot simpler after he announced for North Carolina, because it stopped the recruiting merry-go-round.

"Definitely," he said. "I haven't had to take any visits, I haven't had to talk to multiple coaches every week."

"I've been able to focus on improving my game and also spending more time at the high school with my teammates, working out and getting ready for the season."

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Paige had a hectic summer, traveling all over the country for basketball events, with stops in Oregon, California (four times), Florida, South Carolina and Ohio for the LeBron James camp. "We've just been everywhere," he said.

"I think this summer was big in my development as a player," he added. "I got a lot stronger, and I also improved my shooting a lot. I feel like my game has taken another step."

Now he's focused on his senior year at Linn-Mar. Practice starts Monday, and Paige is looking forward to building a new team and seeing how well they can do.

The Lions went 26-0 and won the Class 4A state title, but all the other starters graduated to college programs. Paige is willing to do whatever it takes to make the Lions a winner, whether that means piling up points or piling up assists.

"I've always taken that approach of whatever is necessary," he said. "If the team needs me to be the scorer for the night, then I'll try and take on that role."

"If not, I'll try to get everyone else involved, because that makes the game easier for the entire team. Whatever they need me to do, whether it's defending the best player on the other team or scoring the most points, because winning is obviously the No. 1 priority for me."