

N.C. coach Roy Williams jets in, watches Paige

Written by Jim Ecker

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North Carolina basketball coach Roy Williams has two private jets at his disposal so he can fly around the country, visit with recruits and spread goodwill.

That's what he did Friday.

Williams flew to Iowa to watch Marcus Paige star for the Linn-Mar Lions on Friday night against the Washington Warriors.

"We have two planes," Williams said during a halftime interview at the Washington gym. "We didn't practice today, so we just flew in and we'll fly back tonight."

Paige, a sensational 6-foot-1 point guard, committed to North Carolina last week and enjoyed seeing his future coach in the Washington gym. He hit four 3-pointers and scored 19 points as the top-ranked Lions belted Washington, 80-55.

"It's a nice feeling to see the coach come out and support me, and it sort of validates my decision," Paige said. "So that was pretty cool."

Williams sat in the stands for the first quarter, then switched to a court-side chair for the rest of the game. He munched popcorn, drank a pop, signed autographs, posed for pictures and enjoyed the show.

Williams, 60, has made a career of plucking talent out of Iowa. He lured Kirk Hinrich, Raef LaFrentz and Nick Collison to Kansas when he was coaching the Jayhawks, and he's persuaded Harrison Barnes and Paige to join him at Carolina.

"We've been very fortunate," he said. "This is my 23rd year (as a head coach), and I've had four kids previously from Iowa and they've been awfully good. So hopefully this next one will be as

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good, too."

Williams led North Carolina to the NCAA title in 2009 and has made seven trips to the Final Four. He's still beating the bushes, searching for talent, spending Friday nights in high school gyms and signing autographs for anyone who asks.

"I've signed a lot and I've been to a lot of gyms, but I love it," he said. "I don't really like to travel, but once I get there I really enjoy it. I enjoy seeing games. If you don't work hard at it, you don't get really good players."

Barnes, a freshman from Ames, scored eight of his 12 points in the final 3 1/2 minutes Thursday night to help North Carolina beat Virginia Tech, 64-61, at home.

"He's going to be a big-time player," Williams said.