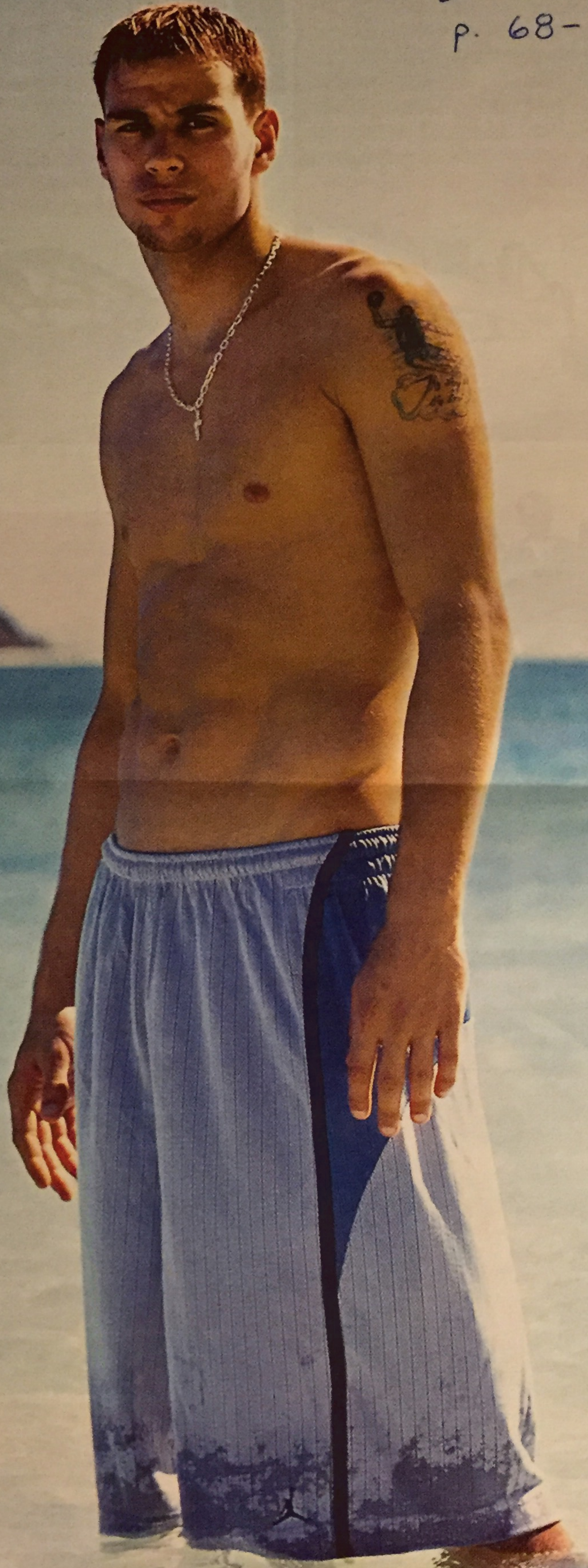


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FAR FROM H

COLLEGE BASKETBALL



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HE'S PLAYING IN PARADISE. BUT CARL ENGLISH STILL CALLS THE UNFORGIVING SHORES OF NEWFOUNDLAND HOME

BY SCOTT BURTON

It's hard to leave Newfoundland, Carl English says, hard to leave home. Then he looks down for a second. How absurd this must seem, right? Home is remote, the easternmost point in North America. Home is harsh, three blizzards in seven days as it sometimes goes. Home is bleak, really bleak. Mainlanders snidely refer to the island as the "have-not province," with its struggling fishing industry and 18% unemployment rate. Their jokes can be cruel: *Two Newfies are standing in a welfare line ...*

How absurd this must seem. And then English explains why Newfoundland is still home, will always be home, even as he lounges in an outdoor Honolulu restaurant six-and-a-half time zones away. As he speaks, the 22-year-old shooting guard—



The view from Aunt Betty and Uncle Junior's house usually included Carl balling on his roadside hoop.

whom his mostly adoring Hawaii teammates say is a little bit nuts and a way bit wild (you'd have to be if your lifelong dream is becoming the first Newfie in the NBA)—gives a hint of his once-thick "fisherman's slang," a puzzling mix of Irish and Cockney, frequently punctuated with the rhetorical "right?"

Newfoundland is beautiful, right? The streams overflow with trout, the wilderness teems with game and the cliffs harbor thousands of birds, some of them native to Ireland, from where so many of the Newfies came centuries ago.

Newfoundland is comfortable, right? In the summer, the docks bustle with fishing boats unloading their quota of cod and crab. In the winter, icebergs roll into the bay. All year round, the pubs rollick with the sounds of Celtic music—fiddle, flute and tin whistle. "Strap yourself to the tree with roots," sing the Masterless

Men (covering Dylan), "you ain't going nowhere."

Newfoundland is friendly, right? You leave your keys in the car, your front door unlocked, and you can hitchhike wherever you need to go. They have a ceremony for visitors: The Screech-In, it's called. You recite a few lines, kiss a cod, down a shot of rum. It's not meant to humiliate, but to initiate. There are no outsiders here, only guests.

And Newfoundland is family, right? Even if ... even if his parents were taken from him by fire,

Like Mad Dog, English balls with hellfire. The 6'5" junior can stroke it deep, take it to the hole and soar above traffic. He won last fall's Midnight Ohana dunk contest by flying over 5'4" walk-on and crowd fave Lance Takaki. He plays with such abandon, in fact, that his strength is also his weakness. Carl wants to be the best player on the floor at all times, so when his shot's not falling, he'll keep shooting and shooting and ... "You sometimes have to calm him down," Martin says, "and put him in his place."

It's not easy. To put it politely, the guy is wired. He melts a straw with a lighter while waiting for a table at a restaurant. He bounces a ball while doing his homework. He's always itching to go to the mall, or the movies, or bowling. And he says some very odd things at some very odd times. During Hawaii's home rout of Rice in January, English was tearing it up with three-balls and reverse layups. But he was also having problems sticking his man, a nondescript guard named Jason McKrieth. (Carl's defense isn't always so wired.) During a timeout, associate coach Jackson Wheeler pulled him aside to ask what was going on.

English looked at Wheeler for a second, his head cocked. Then he grinned.

"You look so sexy tonight," he said.

AFTER LOSING HIS PARENTS AND HIS UNCLE, CARL COULDN'T HELP BUT WO

even if he was separated from his four brothers, even if his Uncle Junior dropped dead in front of him, even if ... No, not even if. Because of this, Newfoundland is family. Because when so much has been taken away, you appreciate that much more those things that remain around you.

It's hard to leave Newfoundland, he says, hard to leave home. But he'll be back some day—hopefully not for a while—when he can say to himself, I've made them proud, I've lived my dream.

Right?

CARL ENGLISH is one of those annoying people who's good at pretty much everything he does, the first time he does it. Ping-Pong, darts, target shooting. He's also one of those annoying people who fits in pretty much everywhere he goes, the first time he goes there. Look at him now: With his Val Kilmer-meets-Guy Pearce looks and perfectly smoothed-out tan and bleach-blond hair, he's quite easily—and quite often—mistaken for a surfer.

Ah, but there's a hole in his game, a big hole. Dude can't dance. He thinks he can, but lord he can't. His two roommates, junior forward Phil Martin and grad student Dikhi Mwai, break into laughter to the point of tears as Dikhi imitates Carl's moves. The only analogy that comes to mind: an ostrich running in place. "Carl makes Mark Madsen look like MC Hammer," Dikhi giggles.



Wheeler loves moments like that. English may be a little hard for his teammates to get sometimes, but for the 43-year-old Wheeler—who lost his first wife to a drunk driver 15 years ago—it's not just "Carl being Carl." It's something else.

"Carl and I, we think on a different level," he says. "We think about wild things. We're always releasing. We're always going forward. At the fastest rate. We have to live life at a certain speed to get away from it."

Wheeler is snapping his fingers. "Because if you can get away from it, it can't damage you."

CARL IS trying to get away from it now, sitting on some cement stairs overlooking the school's track.

What do you know about your mom and dad?

He winces, looks around, stares into nothing. He's been hit with this question many times before. But even though his answers are almost rote by now, his sorrow still shows through.

"Pretty," he finally says. "My mom was pretty. My dad was a hard worker."

He twirls his keys. He turns his head. "Really, I don't know a whole lot."

Carl was 5 when his parents died in a house fire. The family lived in a two-story home in Branch, a small fishing village among dozens of small fishing villages on the Avalon Peninsula overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. Carl's father, Kevin, was a fisherman, as was Kevin's father, and his father before him. Carl's mother, Lavinia, took care of the house and the five boys: Peter, Bradley, Kevin, Carl and Michael.

By most accounts, the fire started when Carl's dad mistakenly used some boat fuel to start a wood-burning oven. Carl says he doesn't care to get into all that. He'll only tell you what you already

game and snare rabbits, and Carl loved it all. But not as much as he loved to play hoops. It came so naturally, felt so easy. There was no sadness, he didn't miss all that he had to miss—not with a basketball in his hands. "I can block things out real easily," he says, "when I'm playing hoops."

When Carl was in sixth grade, Uncle Junior helped him build a hoop in front of their home on the two-lane highway, the only paved area in town. The setup was crude—some leftover plywood, a bicycle rim for a cylinder—but Carl got good fast, playing on that stretch of road while dodging the occasional car. Kevin and Michael would come over after school, and the three brothers played one-on-one (game to seven, winner balls) or lowered the rim and dunked the way they saw MJ and Nique dunk on TV. They played until Kevin and Michael got tired or cold or bored. And then Carl would play by himself until the sun set.

Although no one can remember any Newfies playing major college ball, Uncle Junior told Carl his talent would one day lead him off the island. It was just that obvious. He was Fatima Academy's starting point guard as an eighth grader, dropping 40 like it was sweat and leading his team to wins over schools four times as large. He made the provincial 19-and-under squad when he was 16 and quickly lit it up. "I could score," he says, "when-ever the hell I wanted to."

Uncle Junior made it easy, too. He didn't have much money, so he couldn't pay Carl for helping out on his boat (even though the kid hated the sea and would throw up damn near every time the boat rolled a bit). But Carl always had a good pair of sneakers and a basketball, and whatever tools or lumber he needed to rebuild that hoop out front when the wind or overuse would bring it down. And in the early mornings on that fishing boat, miles from shore, Junior would listen to Carl rhapsodize about getting out, about going some place where college recruiters might actually see him play.

During Carl's junior season, the two talked things over with his provincial coach, who suggested English spend his senior year at St. Thomas Aquinas, a Catholic school outside of Toronto that had sent several kids to Division I programs. So Uncle Junior called his son Howie, who was living in Ontario at the time. Not only did Howie agree to take Carl in, he also moved into the St. Thomas district. That summer, Junior let Carl sell cod tongues on the side—a delicacy going for 80 cents a pound—so he could afford the plane ticket.

Carl missed home immediately, and he wanted to turn around after learning the school wouldn't be fielding a team because of a labor dispute with its teachers. Uncle Junior told him to stick it out. And that winter, Carl hooked up with a prep all-star team. He claims he was the first white guy to ball on the inner-city squad—"Can you hang, Ghost?" they'd say—but he won their respect. First game in,



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PROGRAMMING HIGHLIGHTS

The Forgotten Race: Where the Finish Line Crosses the Color Line
ESPN2; Sat 2/22/03 @ 2-3pm

SportsCentury: Curt Flood
ESPN Classic; Sun 2/23/03 @ 12-1pm

SportsCentury: Jackie Joyner-Kersey
ESPN Classic; Sun 2/23/03 @ 1-2pm

SportsCentury: Tyrone Willingham
ESPN Classic; Sun 2/23/03 @ 2-2:30pm

SportsCentury: Emmitt Smith
ESPN Classic; Sun 2/23/03 @ 2:30-3am

SportsCentury: Frank Robinson
ESPN Classic; Sun 2/23/03 @ 3-4pm

SportsCentury: Wilma Rudolph
ESPN Classic; Sun 2/23/03 @ 4-5pm

SportsCentury: Bo Jackson
ESPN Classic; Sun 2/23/03 @ 5-6pm

SportsCentury: Bill Russell
ESPN Classic; Sun 2/23/03 @ 6-7pm

SportsCentury: Richmond Flowers
ESPN; Sun 2/23/03 @ 6-6:30pm

SportsCentury: Tyrone Willingham
ESPN; Sun 2/23/03 @ 6:30-7pm

SportsCentury: Willie Mays
ESPN Classic; Sun 2/23/03 @ 7-8pm

Harlem Globetrotters 20,000th Game
ESPN2; Mon 2/24/03 @ 7-8:30am

SportsCentury: Emmitt Smith
ESPN2; Mon 2/24/03 @ 8:30-9am

Relatively Speaking: Joe Dumars
ESPN; Mon 2/24/03 @ 2-3pm

"Black Star Risen" Alan Page
ESPN; Mon 2/24/03 @ 3-4pm

**Seasons of Change:
The African American Athlete**
ESPN; Mon 2/24/03 @ 4-5pm

Harlem Globetrotters vs. Michigan State
ESPN2; Tue 2/25/03 @ 7-9am

Harlem Globetrotters 75th Anniversary
ESPN2; Wed 2/26/03 @ 7-9am

Harlem Globetrotters vs. Iowa
ESPN2; Thu 2/27/03 @ 7-9am

Harlem Globetrotters vs. Maryland
ESPN2; Fri 2/28/03 @ 7-9am

For a complete program schedule, log onto
ESPN.com (keyword: Black History) and listen
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WHAT'S LEFT? THE ANSWER: PLENTY.

know: It was Good Friday. He and his brothers made it out of the house unharmed. His parents didn't. They would die a month later from their burns.

Carl doesn't remember them, not really, except that they had great love for him. That's what makes it so tough. He doesn't know in what ways he's like his mom, or whether he thinks like his dad. He missed out, terribly. What else is there to say?

"I have some pictures and stuff," he offers. "And that's fine. That's all I need right now."

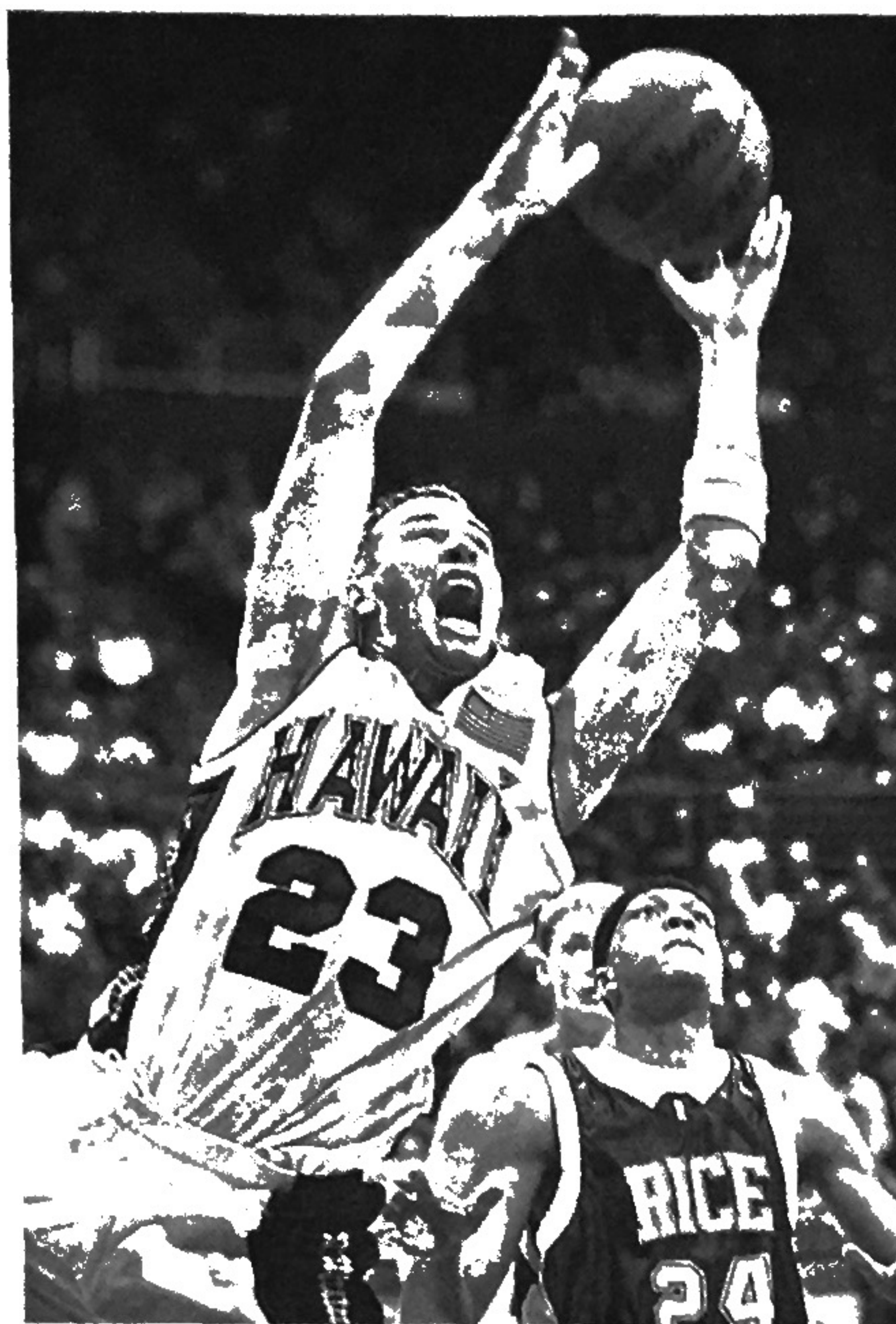
What about Uncle Junior? What do you remember about him?

Carl's face brightens a little. There's a lot to remember.

After the fire, Junior and Betty McGrath took Carl into their home in Patrick's Cove, a town of fewer than 50 people located 13 miles northwest of Branch. Even though the boy missed his brothers dearly—Peter, Kevin and Michael went to live with Aunt Florence 10 minutes away, Bradley with Aunt Shirley two hours away—Uncle Junior and Aunt Betty felt like family almost from the first day. Betty maybe worried too much, and she had her rules, but she treated Carl exactly as she did her other four children. Junior was funny, and so warm. When Aunt Betty would send Carl to his room to do his homework, Uncle Junior was the one to let him out so he could play basketball.

Junior taught Carl how to fish trout and track

Three of Carl's brothers (left to right: Brad, Kevin and Michael) still live in Newfoundland, where they watch his games on the Internet.



WHAT DID CARL ENGLISH LEAVE BEHIND?



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first play in, he shook his defender and dunked over some 6'10" chump. The raucous home crowd went nuts, tossing chairs and benches onto the floor.

After graduating in the spring, English finally got the respect of D1 recruiters, too: He averaged 32 ppg in a New York City prep tournament, then took MVP honors at another tourney in Atlantic City. Hawaii, one of the few schools that still had a scholarship for the fall, offered him a ride. Carl accepted. It was far from home, but it was close enough to chase his dream.

AND THEN so much was taken away. English showed up to practice thinking he'd be big-time from the start. But he had a bum ankle that needed surgery, and coach Riley Wallace decided to redshirt him. He grew restless, and a little bit angry, and he couldn't wait to go home for the summer—even if that meant working on the fishing boat. At least he'd be with Uncle Junior.

But ... well, Uncle Junior had a pacemaker, and he couldn't move his left side much anymore. And one afternoon, as the two unloaded the day's catch, Junior collapsed on the docks, calling out Carl's name before dying of a massive heart attack.

It wasn't fair. It wasn't close to fair.

"Why did I lose two fathers in a lifetime?" Carl says now, staring into nothing again. "It's one thing for me to lose my parents, but then when my uncle died, dropped dead in front of me ... I wondered, What's next?"

He also wondered, *What's left?* And when Carl English was done crying over Uncle Junior, and wondering whether God was testing him, he took a look around, and he thought to himself, *There's plenty left.*

There's basketball. And there's Hawaii.

Both became his refuge.

Basketball became beautiful and easy again. Wallace ignored him at first, but English was killing the starters in practice and making his minutes count, and finally—after Wallace had grown sick of his starting point guard—Coach gave Carl the ball. In the WAC tourney final against Tulsa, English sent the game into overtime, then scored seven points to lead the Rainbow Warriors to the NCAA Tourney for the first time in seven years. The next season, he averaged 15.5 ppg as the starting small forward and took his team to the Dance again.

Hawaii became family. English and Martin—who grew up in Ontario—bonded over their girlfriends back home, and the lack of respect given to

Canadian ballers. The whole team bonded over those brutal 13-day road trips. The player they used to call Newfie had a new nickname now: C-Money.

It's only a temporary home, of course, this other island. Carl, who has one more year of eligibility left, will graduate this spring, and he's anxious to move on, to make good on that NBA dream.

Always moving forward. At the fastest speed.

But it will still be hard to leave. Two years ago, Wallace had the team over for Christmas. During a quiet moment, when the guys were off watching a movie or horsing around with Wallace's kids, Carl pulled Coach aside. "I dream that this is what it would have been like," he said.

CARL ENGLISH returned to Newfoundland last summer. Not that he didn't have anything better to do—he was invited to try out for the Canadian world championship team—but he wanted to clear his head a little, to hang out with his brothers and his longtime girlfriend, Mandy. He even had a guest to show around. Coach Wallace visited for three days in July. English took him everywhere—the docks, the hoop, his school. He drove him past the plot of land where his parents' home once stood. "I'm gonna build something there one day," he said.

He also came back to fish. As much as Carl hates being out on that ocean, Aunt Betty needed someone to catch the quota. "I guess he felt like he should," she says. "Maybe it was out of obligation."

No, not obligation. Appreciation. Because the guy who's always moving forward has a good memory, too. When things are going well—when he's dropped 40 on some sucker like it was sweat, when he's hit a game-winning shot, when he's simply helped a lost teammate figure out how to throw a backpack—Carl thinks about his parents and Uncle Junior. And he says to himself, *I wonder if they are watching, I wonder if they are proud.*

"They are with me," he says. "They are always by my side."

He returned to Newfoundland last summer to take care of one other thing. On a cool windy day in July, Carl and Mandy dropped by a Wal-Mart and bought a bag of soil and some white and orange tulip bulbs. Then they drove to Branch, took a right on a decaying gravel road and headed up a hill, to a graveyard overlooking the Atlantic, where so many generations of fishermen are buried. And at the grave site of Kevin and Lavinia English, Carl dug up the ground and planted the bulbs so that they might bloom this spring.

And be there when he comes back.