



Justin Patton Biography (Includes 2016-17)



Justin Patton

7-0 • 230

Freshman • Center
Omaha, Neb.

#23

2016-17 Season Highlights

- Redshirt freshman who was one of 10 finalists for the Kareem Abdul-Jabbar Award (National Center of the Year) and one of 12 men on the midseason list for the Wayman Tisdale Award (National Freshman of the Year).
- Won Collegelinsider.com's Kyle Macy Award as nation's best freshman.
- BIG EAST Freshman of the Year, and Second Team All-BIG EAST.
- Second in the nation in field goal percentage (67.6%), he made better than 50% of his shots in every game but two.
- Attempting to become second redshirt freshman to ever go in the NBA Lottery (joining Kansas' Ben McLemore), and first who didn't redshirt for academic reasons.
- Finished second in NCAA history for field goal percentage by a freshman, trailing only the 67.8 percent by Hampton's Michael Freeman (2006-07). The previous best mark by a major conference freshman ever had been Sidney Moncrief's 66.5 percent in 1975-76.
- Broke the BIG EAST freshman record for field goal percentage in league play at .663, shattering the old mark of .613 set by Louisville's Samardo Samuels in 2008-09.
- Three-time BIG EAST Freshman of the Week (Nov. 28, Dec. 5, Jan. 9).
- Debuted with 12 points and eight rebounds vs. UMKC (Nov. 11), with 3 dunks.
- Went 8-for-8 and scored 17 points in win over Loyola (Md.).
- Followed that with first career double-double, going 9-for-10 with 21 points and 10 rebounds in win vs. Buffalo (Nov. 29).
- Had 17 points and 9 rebounds vs. Seton Hall in BIG EAST debut (Dec. 28).
- Recorded 18 points and eight rebounds vs. No. 1 Villanova (Dec. 31).
- Scored season-high 25 points and added nine rebounds and four assists in road win at St. John's (Jan. 4).
- Had 20 points, six boards and three blocks in win at Providence (Jan. 7).
- Started game-ending 6-0 run with go-ahead tip-in with 49.0 seconds left in road win at No. 22 Xavier (Jan. 16), finishing with 10 points and nine rebounds.
- Earned third double-double at DePaul (Feb. 11), recording 11 points and a career-high 11 rebounds.
- Scored 21 points in BIG EAST Tournament semifinal vs. Xavier (March 10).
- Fouled out in his NCAA Tournament debut with eight points and seven rebounds vs. Rhode Island (March 17).
- His 13 straight games in double-figures (Dec. 17-Jan. 31) was longest streak by a CU freshman since Rodney Buford (17 straight) in 1996.
- Only 7-footer in program history to make a three-pointer.
- In BIG EAST play, led the league in field goal percentage and ranked fourth in blocked shots per game and fifth in rebounds per game.
- In all games, ranked first in field goal percentage, fourth in blocks per game and fifth in rebounds per game.
- Owned team-high 72 dunks, including 32 lobs.
- Declared for NBA Draft and signed with an agent on April 5th.

Game-by-Game Statistics

#23 Justin Patton's Game-by-Game Stats													
Opponent	Min	FG	Pct	3FG	Pct	FT	Pct	O-D-R	A	T	B	S	Pts.
UMKC	22	4-7	.571	0-1	.000	4-7	.571	1-7-8	2	0	1	0	12
#9 WISCONSIN	29	5-6	.833	0-0	---	0-1	.000	3-4-7	0	0	1	1	10
Washington State	15	5-7	.714	0-1	.000	0-2	.000	1-3-4	0	1	0	0	10
North Carolina State	18	4-5	.800	0-0	---	2-4	.500	1-4-5	1	0	0	1	10
Ole Miss	28	5-7	.714	0-0	---	1-2	.500	2-3-5	2	3	2	0	11
LOYOLA (MD.)	19	8-8	1.000	0-0	---	1-2	.500	0-6-6	0	1	0	1	17
BUFFALO	32	9-10	.900	1-1	1.000	2-4	.500	4-6-10	0	1	2	3	21
AKRON	26	5-7	.714	1-1	1.000	0-1	.000	2-5-7	2	1	2	3	11
Nebraska	21	4-4	1.000	0-0	---	1-4	.250	3-5-8	0	2	3	1	9
LONGWOOD	15	4-5	.800	1-1	1.000	0-1	.000	0-3-3	2	1	3	3	9
ORAL ROBERTS	30	5-8	.625	0-0	---	0-0	---	0-6-6	1	0	2	0	10
Arizona State	33	6-10	.600	1-1	1.000	5-6	.833	1-2-3	4	0	3	1	18
SETON HALL	33	8-13	.615	0-1	.000	1-2	.500	0-9-9	1	2	1	2	17
#1 VILLANOVA	28	9-12	.750	0-0	---	0-0	---	2-6-8	0	2	2	0	18
St. John's	30	11-14	.786	1-1	1.000	2-4	.500	2-7-9	4	3	1	1	25
Providence	35	9-13	.692	0-0	---	2-3	.667	2-4-6	1	2	3	1	20
#12 BUTLER	31	5-6	.833	0-1	.000	0-1	.000	0-2-2	3	4	2	2	10
TRUMAN STATE	18	6-10	.600	0-1	.000	2-4	.500	4-6-10	1	1	1	0	14
#22 Xavier	18	5-9	.556	0-0	---	0-0	---	5-4-9	0	2	3	2	10
MARQUETTE	19	5-9	.556	0-1	.000	1-2	.500	2-2-4	1	0	0	2	11
Georgetown	29	9-13	.692	0-0	---	2-6	.333	3-4-7	1	3	2	2	20
DEPAUL	28	4-6	.667	0-0	---	6-8	.750	0-5-5	0	6	1	1	14
#16 Butler	24	7-10	.700	1-1	1.000	0-0	---	0-7-7	1	4	2	1	15
XAVIER	28	2-5	.400	0-0	---	3-4	.750	1-2-3	2	1	5	0	7
DePaul	22	5-9	.556	0-0	---	1-1	1.000	3-8-11	2	1	2	0	11
Seton Hall	32	7-10	.700	0-0	---	1-1	1.000	1-1-2	1	1	1	1	15
GEORGETOWN	24	5-7	.714	0-0	---	0-1	.000	3-3-6	2	3	0	0	10
PROVIDENCE	26	6-11	.545	1-1	1.000	4-6	.667	2-4-6	2	2	0	0	17
#2 Villanova	25	2-3	.667	0-0	---	0-0	---	0-5-5	1	6	0	1	4
ST. JOHN'S	21	4-6	.667	0-0	---	0-0	---	2-7-9	3	2	1	1	8
Marquette	19	5-7	.714	0-0	---	1-1	1.000	1-4-5	1	1	0	0	11
Providence	28	4-6	.667	0-0	---	1-6	.167	2-6-8	0	2	1	1	9
Xavier	31	10-13	.769	1-1	1.000	0-0	---	1-2-3	0	1	2	0	21
#2 Villanova	27	5-8	.625	0-0	---	0-0	---	2-3-5	0	1	0	0	10
Rhode Island	21	3-12	.250	0-1	.000	2-3	.667	3-4-7	0	0	1	0	8

Season and Career Highs

#23 Justin Patton	SEASON	CAREER
Points	25 at St. John's, 1/4	Same
Rebounds	11 at DePaul, 2/11	Same
FG	11 at St. John's, 1/4	Same
FGA	14 at St. John's, 1/4	Same
3FG	1 (8x) last vs. Xavier, 3/10	1 (8x) last vs. Xavier, 3/10/17
3FGA	1 (15x) last vs. Rhode Island, 3/17	1 (15x) last vs. Rhode Island, 3/17/17
FT	6 DePaul, 1/28	Same
FTA	8 DePaul, 1/28	Same
Assists	4 (2x) last at St. John's, 1/4	4 (2x) last at St. John's, 1/4/17
Steals	3 (2x) last Longwood, 12/9	3 (2x) last Longwood, 12/9/16
Blocks	5 Xavier, 2/4	Same
Minutes	35 at Providence, 1/7	Same

Justin Patton's Career Statistics

Year	GP-GS	Min.-Avg.	FGM-A	Pct.	3FGM-A	Pct.	FTM-A	Pct.	Off-Def	Total	Avg.	PF-D	Ast.	TO	Blk.	Stl.	Pts. Avg.
2015-16	Redshirted at Creighton																
2016-17	35-34	885-25.3	200-296	.676	8-15	.533	45-87	.517	59-159	218	6.2	96-3	41	60	50	30	453 12.9
Totals	35-34	885-25.3	200-296	.676	8-15	.533	45-87	.517	59-159	218	6.2	96-3	41	60	50	30	453 12.9



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JUSTIN PATTON

7-0 • 230 • Redshirt Freshman
Center
Omaha, Neb.
North High School

Personal

- Born on June 14, 1997.
- Son of Tora Patton.
- Has siblings Terrel Steen (23), Kendall Patton (19) and Raven Bryson (8).
- Is the cousin of former Creighton Basketball big man Donnie Johnson.
- Is a social work major with a minor in communication.
- Nickname is Big Muddy.
- Dream job is to become a Division I basketball coach or NBA player.
- Favorite meal is spaghetti.
- Sports hero is Kevin Durant.
- Favorite song is Sam Hunt's *House Party*.
- If he could meet anyone, it'd be comedian Kevin Hart.
- Best summer vacation he ever went on was last year's trip to Italy.
- Favorite color is orange.
- Favorite professional team is the Oklahoma City Thunder.
- Doesn't go anywhere without his phone.
- Biggest influence in his life besides his parents is coach Greg McDermott.
- Favorite book is *The Great Gatsby*.
- Favorite movie is *Ride Along*.
- First job as a kid was at a lemonade stand.
- Dream date is Nia Long.



2015-16: Redshirted at Creighton

- Finished Creighton's exhibition game vs. Upper Iowa (Nov. 6) with seven points and two rebounds in just six minutes.
- Was allowed to practice and travel during his redshirt season.

Summer 2015: Italy Trip

- Averaged 7.0 points and 5.3 rebounds in 13.3 minutes per game in Italy.
- Finished game at All Star Rome with 10 points and three rebounds in 11 minutes, making 5-of-6 shots.

North High School

- Developed from a relatively unknown prospect as a junior to a five-star prospect and top-50 recruit by the end of his senior year at Omaha North.

- Ranked 24th in the final 2015 Scout rankings of high school seniors, and eighth among centers.
- Named First Team All-State by the *Omaha World-Herald* and captain of the All-Metro Team, becoming North's first team all-state selection since Darryl Roddy in 1986.
- Led North to a school-record 23 wins in 27 games, a district title and a state tournament appearance.
- Averaged 14.1 points, 9.9 rebounds and 3.6 blocked shots per game.
- Averaged 11.8 points and 7.9 rebounds per game as a junior.
- High school coach was Jared Anderson.
- Played in the Kentucky Derby Classic All-Star Game, finishing with 17 points in 19 minutes on 7-of-9 shooting and four rebounds, three assists and a pair of steals.



**2016-17 Creighton Men's Basketball
Creighton Individual Game-by-Game (FINAL)
All games**

#23 PATTON,Justin

Opponent	Date	gs	min	Total		3-Pointers		Free throws		Rebounds				pf	a	t/o	blk	stl	pts	avg	
				fg-fga	pct	3fg-fga	pct	ft-fa	pct	off	def	tot	avg								
UMKC	11-11-16	*	22	4-7	.571	0-1	.000	4-7	.571	1	7	8	8.0	2	2	0	1	0	12	12.0	
#9 WISCONSIN	11-15-16	*	29	5-6	.833	0-0	.000	0-1	.000	3	4	7	7.5	2	0	0	1	1	10	11.0	
vs Washington State	11-18-16	*	15	5-7	.714	0-1	.000	0-2	.000	1	3	4	6.3	1	0	1	0	0	10	10.7	
vs NC State	11-20-16	*	18	4-5	.800	0-0	.000	2-4	.500	1	4	5	6.0	3	1	0	0	1	10	10.5	
vs Ole Miss	11-21-16	*	28	5-7	.714	0-0	.000	1-2	.500	2	3	5	5.8	4	2	3	2	0	11	10.6	
LOYOLA (MD.)	11-26-16	*	19	8-8	1.000	0-0	.000	1-2	.500	0	6	6	5.8	3	0	1	0	1	17	11.7	
BUFFALO	11-29-16	*	32	9-10	.900	1-1	1.000	2-4	.500	4	6	10	6.4	0	0	1	2	1	21	13.0	
AKRON	12-03-16	*	26	5-7	.714	1-1	1.000	0-1	.000	2	5	7	6.5	3	2	1	2	3	11	12.8	
at Nebraska	12-07-16	*	21	4-4	1.000	0-0	.000	1-4	.250	3	5	8	6.7	4	0	2	3	1	9	12.3	
LONGWOOD	12-09-16	*	15	4-5	.800	1-1	1.000	0-1	.000	0	3	3	6.3	1	2	1	3	3	9	12.0	
ORAL ROBERTS	12-17-16	*	30	5-8	.625	0-0	.000	0-0	.000	0	6	6	6.3	1	1	0	2	0	10	11.8	
at Arizona State	12-20-16	*	33	6-10	.600	1-1	1.000	5-6	.833	1	2	3	6.0	4	4	0	3	1	18	12.3	
SETON HALL	12-28-16	*	33	8-13	.615	0-1	.000	1-2	.500	0	9	9	6.2	2	1	2	1	2	17	12.7	
#1 VILLANOVA	12-31-16	*	28	9-12	.750	0-0	.000	0-0	.000	2	6	8	6.4	2	0	2	2	0	18	13.1	
at St. John's	01-04-17	*	30	11-14	.786	1-1	1.000	2-4	.500	2	7	9	6.5	5	4	3	1	1	25	13.9	
at Providence	01-07-17	*	35	9-13	.692	0-0	.000	2-3	.667	2	4	6	6.5	2	1	2	3	1	20	14.3	
#12 BUTLER	01-11-17	*	31	5-6	.833	0-1	.000	0-1	.000	0	2	2	6.2	2	3	4	2	2	10	14.0	
TRUMAN STATE	01-14-17	*	18	6-10	.600	0-1	.000	2-4	.500	4	6	10	6.4	1	1	1	1	0	14	14.0	
at #22 Xavier	01-16-17	*	18	5-9	.556	0-0	.000	0-0	.000	5	4	9	6.6	4	0	2	3	2	10	13.8	
MARQUETTE	01-21-17	*	19	5-9	.556	0-1	.000	1-2	.500	2	2	4	6.5	4	1	0	0	2	11	13.7	
at Georgetown	01-25-17	*	29	9-13	.692	0-0	.000	2-6	.333	3	4	7	6.5	3	1	3	2	2	20	14.0	
DEPAUL	01-28-17	*	28	4-6	.667	0-0	.000	6-8	.750	0	5	5	6.4	3	0	6	1	1	14	14.0	
at #16 Butler	01-31-17	*	24	7-10	.700	1-1	1.000	0-0	.000	0	7	7	6.4	3	1	4	2	1	15	14.0	
XAVIER	02-04-17	*	28	2-5	.400	0-0	.000	3-4	.750	1	2	3	6.3	1	2	1	5	0	7	13.7	
at DePaul	02-11-17	*	22	5-9	.556	0-0	.000	1-1	1.000	3	8	11	6.5	1	2	1	2	0	11	13.6	
at Seton Hall	02-15-17	*	32	7-10	.700	0-0	.000	1-1	1.000	1	1	2	6.3	3	1	1	1	1	15	13.7	
GEORGETOWN	02-19-17	*	24	5-7	.714	0-0	.000	0-1	.000	3	3	6	6.3	4	2	3	0	0	10	13.5	
PROVIDENCE	02-22-17	*	26	6-11	.545	1-1	1.000	4-6	.667	2	4	6	6.3	3	2	2	0	0	17	13.6	
at #2 Villanova	02-25-17	*	25	2-3	.667	0-0	.000	0-0	.000	0	5	5	6.2	3	1	6	0	1	4	13.3	
ST. JOHN'S	02-28-17	*	21	4-6	.667	0-0	.000	0-0	.000	2	7	9	6.3	4	3	2	1	1	8	13.1	
at Marquette	03-04-17	*	19	5-7	.714	0-0	.000	1-1	1.000	1	4	5	6.3	1	1	1	0	0	11	13.1	
vs Providence	03-09-17	*	28	4-6	.667	0-0	.000	1-6	.167	2	6	8	6.3	4	0	2	1	1	9	12.9	
vs Xavier	03-10-17	*	31	10-13	.769	1-1	1.000	0-0	.000	1	2	3	6.2	3	0	1	2	0	21	13.2	
vs #2 Villanova	03-11-17	*	27	5-8	.625	0-0	.000	0-0	.000	2	3	5	6.2	5	0	1	0	0	10	13.1	
vs Rhode Island	03-17-17	*	21	3-12	.250	0-1	.000	2-3	.667	3	4	7	6.2	5	0	0	1	0	8	12.9	
Totals			34	885	200-296	.676	8-15	.533	45-87	.517	59	159	218	6.2	96	41	60	50	30	453	12.9

Games played: 35
Minutes/game: 25.3
Points/game: 12.9
FG Pct: 67.6
3FG Pct: 53.3
FT Pct: 51.7

Rebounds/game: 6.2
Assists/game: 1.2
Turnovers/game: 1.7
Assist/turnover ratio: 0.7
Steals/game: 0.9
Blocks/game: 1.4

Creighton's All-Time NBA Draft Pick History

Name	Year Drafted	Pick (Round)	Team
Benoit Benjamin	1985	3 (1st)	Los Angeles Clippers
Cyril Baptiste*	1971	3 (1st-HD)	San Francisco Warriors
Bob Portman	1969	7 (1st)	San Francisco Warriors
Doug McDermott	2014	11 (1st)	Denver Nuggets
Paul Silas	1964	12 (2nd)	St. Louis Hawks
Neil Johnson	1966	15 (2nd)	Baltimore Bullets
Wally Anderzunas	1969	25 (2nd)	Atlanta Hawks
Ed Cole	1955	29 (4th)	New York Knicks
Joe Bergman	1971	31 (2nd)	Cincinnati Royals
Chad Gallagher	1991	32 (2nd)	Phoenix Suns
Kyle Korver	2003	51 (2nd)	New Jersey Nets
Rodney Buford	1999	53 (2nd)	Miami Heat
Rick Apke	1978	58 (3rd)	Washington Bullets
Vernon Moore	1985	58 (3rd)	Washington Bullets
Wally Anderzunas	1968	70 (6th)	Detroit Pistons
Dick Harvey	1960	71 (10th)	Minneapolis Lakers
Alex Stivrins#	1985	75 (4th)	Seattle SuperSonics
Ralph Bobik	1974	76 (5th)	Phoenix Suns
Kevin McKenna	1981	88 (4th)	Los Angeles Lakers
Elton McGriff	1965	93 (12th)	St. Louis Hawks
Joe Bergman	1970	104 (7th)	San Francisco Warriors
Gene Harmon	1974	107 (6th)	Boston Celtics
John Johnson	1979	144 (7th)	Denver Nuggets
Doug Brookins	1975	160 (9th)	Washington Bullets
George Morrow	1981	182 (8th)	Boston Celtics
Daryl Stovall	1982	207 (10th)	San Diego Clippers
Greg Brandon	1984	219 (10th)	Seattle SuperSonics

Creighton's All-Time ABA Draft Pick History

Tim Powers	1967	Rounds 1-5	Minnesota Muskies (ABA)
Wally Anderzunas	1968	Rounds 6-10	Dallas Chaparrals (ABA)
Bob Portman	1969	2nd Round	Denver Rockets (ABA)
Joe Bergman	1970	Rounds 6-10	Kentucky Colonels

*Baptiste was picked in the 1971 Hardship Draft, which was separate from the 10-round 1971 NBA draft.
#Stivrins followed Creighton coach Tom Apke and transferred to Colorado for his final two seasons of eligibility



Creighton graduate Kyle Korver (left) led the NBA with 226 three-pointers in 2004-05, in free-throw percentage in 2006-07 (91.4%) and in three-point percentage in 2009-10 (an NBA-record .536), 2013-14 (.472), 2014-15 (.492) and 2016-17 (.451). In 2009-10 he set an NBA single-season record for three-point accuracy at 53.6 percent. His 43.1 percent career accuracy from '3' ranks seventh in NBA history, and his 2,049 career treys are fifth-most all-time. He now plays for the Cleveland Cavaliers. In 2010, Anthony Tolliver (right) turned a 10-day contract with Golden State into a starting role that saw him produce 12 double-doubles with single-game highs of 34 points and 21 rebounds. He averaged 7.1 points and 3.7 rebounds per game last year with the Sacramento Kings.

(photo by Scott Cunningham - NBAE/Getty Images)



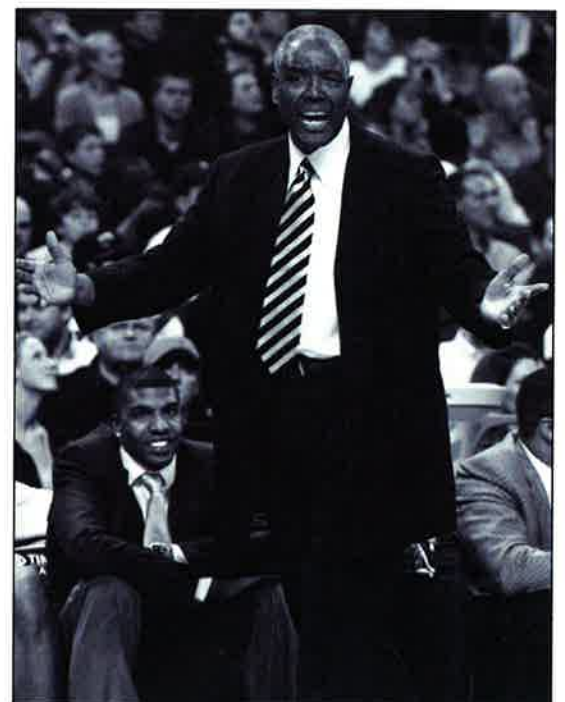
"I'm more proud of my academic success at Creighton than of all my athletic accomplishments.

"What Creighton University does for an athlete or any student is that they teach you how to think, how to deal with everyday living.

"What I learned at Creighton has helped me close the gap between professional sports and the business world."

Paul Silas

Former Creighton All-American
Creighton's first Academic All-American
12 Year NBA head coach



After a standout 16-year playing career, Creighton grad Paul Silas coached 12 seasons in the NBA. Silas has led the Clippers, Hornets, Cavaliers and Bobcats on the sideline.

(photo courtesy Charlotte Bobcats/NBAE)

"I was able to play with a great group of guys and played for some top-notch coaches at Creighton. The University was 100 percent behind us, and the city made me feel like I was one of them. I'm proud of what we accomplished and how we did it. It was through hard work, and we proved a lot of people wrong."

Kyle Korver

Current Atlanta Hawks forward
Former Creighton All-American

Creighton Players in the NBA Career Stats

Wally Anderzunas																
Years	GP	Min.	Pts.	PPG	FG-ATT	FG%	FTM-ATT	FT%	3FG-ATT	3FG%	REB	RPG	AST	STL	BLK	TO
1969-70	44	370	159	3.6	65-166	.392	29-46	.630	0-0	---	82	1.9	9	-	-	-

Benoit Benjamin																
Years	GP	Min.	Pts.	PPG	FG-ATT	FG%	FTM-ATT	FT%	3FG-ATT	3FG%	REB	RPG	AST	STL	BLK	TO
1985-00	807	21911	9223	11.4	3588-7224	.497	2046-2837	.721	1-21	.048	6063	7.5	1070	522	1581	1847

Rodney Buford																
Years	GP	Min.	Pts.	PPG	FG-ATT	FG%	FTM-ATT	FT%	3FG-ATT	3FG%	REB	RPG	AST	STL	BLK	TO
1999-2005	230	4183	1472	6.4	630-1530	.412	138-182	.758	74-247	.300	598	2.6	179	115	31	140

Chad Gallagher																
Years	GP	Min.	Pts.	PPG	FG-ATT	FG%	FTM-ATT	FT%	3FG-ATT	3FG%	REB	RPG	AST	STL	BLK	TO
1993-94	2	3	6	3.0	3-3	1.000	0-0	---	0-0	---	0	0.0	0	0	0	0

Ward "Hoot" Gibson																
Years	GP	Min.	Pts.	PPG	FG-ATT	FG%	FTM-ATT	FT%	3FG-ATT	3FG%	REB	RPG	AST	STL	BLK	TO
1949-50	32	--	176	5.5	67-195	.344	42-64	.656	0-0	---	-	-	37	-	-	--

Neil Johnson																
Years	GP	Min.	Pts.	PPG	FG-ATT	FG%	FTM-ATT	FT%	3FG-ATT	3FG%	REB	RPG	AST	STL	BLK	TO
1966-70	202	2263	798	4.0	300-705	.426	198-323	.613	0-0	---	685	3.4	217	-	-	-

Kyle Korver																
Years	GP	Min.	Pts.	PPG	FG-ATT	FG%	FTM-ATT	FT%	3FG-ATT	3FG%	REB	RPG	AST	STL	BLK	TO
2003-Present	1031	27315	10295	10.0	3554-8017	.443	1138-1293	.880	2049-4754	.431	3195	3.1	1877	722	352	1128

Doug McDermott																
Years	GP	Min.	Pts.	PPG	FG-ATT	FG%	FTM-ATT	FT%	3FG-ATT	3FG%	REB	RPG	AST	STL	BLK	TO
2014-Present	183	3690	1465	8.0	556-1248	.446	153-183	.836	200-507	.394	417	2.3	123	31	12	108

Kevin McKenna																
Years	GP	Min.	Pts.	PPG	FG-ATT	FG%	FTM-ATT	FT%	3FG-ATT	3FG%	REB	RPG	AST	STL	BLK	TO
1981-88	243	3460	1320	5.4	498-1204	.414	221-270	.819	103-283	.364	317	1.3	342	184	25	204

Bob Portman																
Years	GP	Min.	Pts.	PPG	FG-ATT	FG%	FTM-ATT	FT%	3FG-ATT	3FG%	REB	RPG	AST	STL	BLK	TO
1969-73	221	2937	1254	5.7	519-1172	.443	216-277	.780	0-0	---	729	3.3	128	-	-	-

Paul Silas																
Years	GP	Min.	Pts.	PPG	FG-ATT	FG%	FTM-ATT	FT%	3FG-ATT	3FG%	REB	RPG	AST	STL	BLK	TO
1964-80	1254	34989	11782	9.4	4293-9949	.432	3196-4748	.673	0-0	---	12357	9.9	2572	358	138	333

Alex Stivirins																
Years	GP	Min.	Pts.	PPG	FG-ATT	FG%	FTM-ATT	FT%	3FG-ATT	3FG%	REB	RPG	AST	STL	BLK	TO
1985-86, 92-93	22	90	44	2.0	20-43	.465	4-8	.500	0-2	.000	22	1.0	4	2	2	10

Anthony Tolliver																
Years	GP	Min.	Pts.	PPG	FG-ATT	FG%	FTM-ATT	FT%	3FG-ATT	3FG%	REB	RPG	AST	STL	BLK	TO
2008-Present	520	10390	3205	6.2	1079-2608	.414	475-620	.766	572-1581	.362	1836	3.5	470	200	160	331

Creighton Players in the ABA Career Stats

Neil Johnson																
Years	GP	Min.	Pts.	PPG	FG-ATT	FG%	FTM-ATT	FT%	3FG-ATT	3FG%	REB	RPG	AST	STL	BLK	TO
1971-73	178	4154	1835	10.3	736-1460	.504	362-509	.711	1-6	.167	1318	7.4	415	-	-	198

Elton McGriff																
Years	GP	Min.	Pts.	PPG	FG-ATT	FG%	FTM-ATT	FT%	3FG-ATT	3FG%	REB	RPG	AST	STL	BLK	TO
1967-69	56	864	338	6.0	124-260	.477	90-152	.592	0-1	.000	258	4.6	10	-	-	53



Benoit Benjamin
1st Round NBA
Draft Choice in 1985



Bob Portman
1st Round NBA
Draft Choice in 1969



Neil Johnson
2nd Round NBA
Draft Choice in 1966



Wally Anderzunas
2nd Round NBA
Draft Choice in 1969



Kyle Korver
2nd Round NBA
Draft Choice in 2003



Anthony Tolliver
Undrafted
Seven-Year NBA Veteran

Justin Patton poised to join exclusive club of Nebraskans selected in NBA draft

Omaha World-Herald, June 21, 2017

Justin Patton, an Omaha North grad, could join an exclusive club if he's picked during tonight's NBA draft. According to Basketball-Reference.com, 12 high school players from Nebraska have gone on to play at least one game in the NBA.

That list includes four first-round draft picks and even a No. 1 overall selection. While some never amounted to much in the NBA, others have gone on to have storied careers. Some even won NBA championships.

Here's a closer look at the 11 players from Nebraska that have been selected in the NBA draft:

Wally Anderzunas

High school: Omaha Creighton Prep | College: Creighton

Drafted: 2nd round, 25th overall, Atlanta Hawks, 1969

A two-time All-Nebraska pick, Anderzunas led Omaha Creighton Prep to a state title in 1964. He then went to Creighton, where he still ranks No. 22 in school history with 1,276 career points. He spent one season in the NBA with the Cincinnati Royals, averaging 3.6 points in 44 games during the 1969-70 season.

Ron Boone

High school: Omaha Tech | College: Idaho State

Drafted: 11th round, 147th overall, Phoenix Suns, 1968

Boone was an Iron Man, playing in 1,041 consecutive games during a 14-year professional career between the ABA and NBA. He ranks third all-time in the ABA with 12,153 career points and won a league championship in 1971 with the Utah Stars. Between both the ABA and NBA, he averaged 16.8 points, 4.2 rebounds and 3.7 assists per game during his career. At Idaho State, he ranks fifth in school history with a career 20-point scoring average. Boone ranks No. 26 on the Nebraska 100.

Bob Boozer

High school: Omaha Tech | College: Kansas State

Drafted: 1st round, 1st overall, Cincinnati Royals, 1959

A two-time All-American at Kansas State, an Olympic gold medalist, an NBA champion with the Milwaukee Bucks — Boozer is widely considered the greatest basketball player produced by the state of Nebraska. He averaged a double-double at K-State with 21.9 points and 10.7 rebounds and led the Wildcats to the 1958 Final Four. He then spent 11 seasons in the NBA after getting drafted first overall in 1959. He averaged 14.8 points and 8.1 rebounds per game in 11 NBA season. Boozer retired after winning a league championship in 1971. Boozer ranks No. 4 on the Nebraska 100.

Dwaine Dillard

High school: Omaha Central | College: Eastern Michigan

Drafted: 6th round, 89th overall, Baltimore Bullets, 1972

Dillard was twice named All-Nebraska playing for Omaha Central in the late 1960's. He then went on to Eastern Michigan and got drafted by the Baltimore Bullets in 1972, but Dillard never did play in an NBA game. He had a brief, three-game stint in the ABA before catching on with the Harlem Globetrotters.

Dave Hoppen

High school: Omaha Benson | College: Nebraska

Drafted: 3rd round, 65th overall, Atlanta Hawks, 1986

A member of the 2017 Nebraska Athletics Hall of Fame class, Hoppen broke or tied 19 NU records and five Big Eight records in becoming the Huskers' all-time leading scorer with 2,167 points. Hoppen was also a four-time All-Big Eight selection with three first-team distinctions. An injury his senior year hindered his professional future, but he did spend parts of six seasons in the NBA with five teams, averaging 5 points, 3.8 rebounds and 14 minutes a game. Hoppen is No. 78 on the Nebraska 100.

Lee Johnson

High school: Omaha South | College: East Texas State

Drafted: 1st round, 17th overall, Houston Rockets, 1979

A second-team All-Nebraska selection in 1975 from Omaha South, Johnson went to East Texas State — now known as Texas A&M-Commerce — where he still ranks second with 118 career blocked shots and holds the single-season record with 84 blocks in 1978-79. His single-season total of 653 points that year also ranks third in program history. A first-round draft pick in 1979, Johnson played in only 12 games in his brief NBA career.

Rich King

High school: Omaha Burke | College: Nebraska

Drafted: 1st round, 14th overall, Seattle SuperSonics, 1991

At 7-foot-2, King is the tallest player ever named to the All-Nebraska team, earning that honor in 1987 as a senior for Omaha Burke. He then went on to Nebraska, where he still ranks third with 183 blocks, fifth with 761 rebounds and 11th with 1,475 career points. He also helped lead the Huskers to a No. 3 seed in the 1991 NCAA tournament, averaging 15.5 points during that season. He spent four seasons in the NBA, mostly as a reserve, playing in 72 games for the Seattle SuperSonics.

Bart Kofoed

High school: Omaha Westside | College: Kearney State

Drafted: 5th round, 107th overall, Utah Jazz, 1987

Despite never being named All-Nebraska, Kofoed became an NAIA All-American at Kearney State in 1987. He still holds the school records for career scoring average (23.9 points) and assists average (5.82). Kofoed played five seasons in the NBA from 1987-93 with four teams, averaging 6.3 minutes in 111 career games.

Tom Kropp

High school: Aurora | College: Kearney State

Drafted: 3rd round, 48th overall, Washington Bullets, 1975

Kropp holds the distinction of being drafted by an NFL team (Pittsburgh Steelers), ABA team (Denver Nuggets) and NBA team (Washington Bullets). He chose the NBA and played two seasons with the Bullets and Chicago Bulls before heading off to play in Europe. In high school, he led Aurora to six state championships in three sports. He then became an NAIA All-American in both football and basketball at Kearney State. He would later serve as basketball coach at his alma mater for 25 years. Kropp ranks No. 9 on the Nebraska 100.

Mike McGee

High school: Omaha North | College: Michigan

Drafted: 1st round, 19th overall, Los Angeles Lakers, 1981

McGee was twice named All-Nebraska, was The World-Herald's 1977 high school athlete of the year and held 10 Metro Conference scoring records by the end of his Omaha North career. A four-year starter at Michigan, he led the Wolverines in scoring all four seasons — the first player in school history to do that — and still ranks second with 2,439 career points. As a pro, he won a pair of NBA championships with the Los Angeles Lakers in 1982 and 1985. McGee is No. 15 on the Nebraska 100.

Alex Stivrins

High school: Lincoln East | College: Colorado

Drafted: 4th round, 75th overall, Seattle SuperSonics, 1985

A two-time All-Nebraska pick, Stivrins began his college career at Creighton before transferring to Colorado. He led the Buffs in rebounding both seasons he played there and finished sixth nationally in 1985. He averaged a double-double during his Colorado career with 13.9 points and 10.4 rebounds. He played three games in his first NBA season after getting drafted by Seattle in 1985. He then went on to play in France, Italy and the CBA before making a return to the NBA in 1992-93, appearing in games for four different teams during that season.

Justin Patton's draft night is a validation for Bob Franzese and growing youth hoops movement in Omaha

By Tom Shatel / World-Herald columnist Jun 22, 2017

Bob Franzese flew to New York City with Justin Patton this week. And he couldn't help but recall their first trip to an airport together.

"The first time we took him to Las Vegas, he was 16," Franzese says. "He could hardly climb out of his grandparents' car.

"I don't think he'd been on a plane before. We had to say, 'Justin, come on. The plane's going to leave.'

"He just wouldn't come into the airport. We got him in and got him on.

"The rest is history."

The rest of the incredible Justin Patton story continues to unfold, and a big chapter figures to happen tonight at the NBA draft in Brooklyn. The 7-foot Omaha and Creighton kid will be surrounded by his support staff, including mother Tora and his AAU coach and friend, Franzese.

It's hard to know who is the more unlikely character at the Barclays Center tonight — Patton or Franzese.

Franzese is co-owner and general manager of the Omaha Sports Academy. He's also the coach, mentor and confidant to Patton.

Mostly, he's the Omaha gym rat who made it to the NBA draft.

Franzese said he won't be sitting at Patton's table tonight. He'll be at a table in a back room, likely watching the drama unfold on TV. If he should appear on TV at some point, a legion of kids and parents back in Omaha would probably yell at their TVs.

There's OSA Bob!

He is synonymous with basketball in Omaha. The sport is exploding in this city, and Franzese seems to be in the middle of it.

Taking his OSA Crusaders AAU teams around to wherever college coaches watch summer games. Hanging with high school coaches and players. Showing up at Creighton basketball practice. Driving up in a golf cart with Tim Miles.

Not bad for a kid from Omaha Central who said he was on "the worst sophomore and JV teams in the history of Central basketball."

One day back in the early '90s, Franzese told Central coach Rick Behrens that there were five guys ahead of him on the depth chart and that he didn't like his chances of playing. Behrens agreed.

And that gave Franzese an early start down the path to the NBA draft.

It started when he was 13, at the Maple Street YMCA. Through high school and his years at Wayne State College, the Maple St. "Y" was his hangout. He coached, officiated games, worked the concession stand and developed a skill that would come in handy.

"I learned to work with parents," Franzese said. "And my resolution skills have served me well."

He soon became the guy working Dana Altman's camps at Creighton. Then at UNO, where he struck up a friendship with Derrin Hansen. He helped coach at Lewis Central and Skutt high schools.

He was the athletic director at the Omaha Jewish Community Center when a friend, Jeff Epstein, said he wanted to help back him on a dream: a basketball facility.

Nine years ago, OSA was born.

"We really felt like there was a need in Omaha for something like this," Franzese said. "We got it at the right time. Youth sports has been like a snowball going downhill.

"It just keeps picking up steam. We had about 150 teams that first year. Now, we have 500 in the fall and 600 in the winter."

Omaha has always been a big participation town; OSA gave hoops a place to grow. Camps. Youth leagues. Select teams. AAU.

Lately, the summer leagues — featuring current and older college players from CU, UNO and nearby state schools — have grown to the point where they needed bleachers to take care of all the fans showing up to watch.

This year, OSA has summer leagues at the sparkling new Iowa West Field House in Council Bluffs.

“The CWS brings in people, obviously,” Franzese said. “But the tournaments like the ‘Slump Busters,’ they bring in the masses. Omaha is a perfect amateur sports town.

“There’s a youth sports movement, not just basketball. Look at volleyball and soccer. People are die-hards about their sports. It’s what families do, how they plan their vacations. Go to Las Vegas, family vacation/basketball tournament.”

All this year-round playing and coaching has raised the level of basketball in Omaha and Nebraska — particularly at the high school level.

Patton is the poster boy for the movement: a graduate of OSA, North and Creighton hoops. He was in the OSA program when he started turning heads: that sophomore year, when he grew 8 inches.

“I happened to be coaching our youth team,” Franzese said. “I needed another big, so I went out and watched him play. I loved what I saw.”

Patton’s game was so raw back then. Year by year, he and his game have grown. He was a perimeter player early on, and sprouting to 7-feet hasn’t taken away his love for shooting the 3.

His game evolved to the point where he’s going to be a first-round NBA pick after one year of playing college ball. It’s all gone so fast, but some days Franzese still sees that kid who wouldn’t get on the plane.

“He’s a kid who loves the game,” Franzese said. “The Saturday after the Rhode Island game (Creighton’s NCAA loss in March), I walk into OSA on a Saturday and he’s playing a pickup game.

“This is not 18 hours later. I didn’t think anything about it, but later I told him, ‘OK, you better not play anymore pickup, five on five.’

“Later, we’re back at my house hanging out, and some kids are having a pickup game. Justin is in a full-blown three-on-three pickup game.

“I said, ‘We’re going to stop this now. He’s not going to blow out a knee on my watch.’

“News travels fast on social media. There were probably 25 kids who came down because he was there. He wouldn’t leave until he took a picture with all of them.”

He’s a fun-loving, big-hearted kid who just turned 20. And that’s what worries some who are close to Patton. If there was a reason to have him back for one more season at CU, it was the idea of Patton being away from home, by himself, next year.

“That has come up,” Franzese said. “He’s going to have to be disciplined in his day-to-day approach. It’s very important that he be drafted by the right team.

“I don’t think people realize that when he’s done with (Creighton) practice here, he walks across the street to his dorms and hangs out with his brother and Khyri (Thomas). In the NBA, most of his teammates are going to be married. There’s probably not a lot of socialization that goes on. Those guys are trying to take your minutes.”

On Monday, Franzese had lunch with Patton and a financial advisor. The plan: Give him a plan.

“Justin has adjusted every step along the way, and I think he’ll shine,” Franzese said. “He’s a guy who if he has a plan, he’s very good at following that plan. I don’t know a lot of 20-year-olds who are coming into that kind of money.”

All that changes tonight. What a magical ride it’s been, for Franzese, for all of us. Looking around the courts at OSA and Omaha, it probably won’t be the last.

Former Bluejay standout Justin Patton, who cultivated his passion playing in Omaha, is on brink of NBA dream

By Jon Nyatawa / World-Herald staff writer Jun 21, 2017

The room had emptied, and there stood Justin Patton with four of his most trusted mentors huddled around him.

"How do you feel?"

They were curious because for roughly 30 minutes at a press conference called on his behalf, Patton was asked to explain the reasons for leaving Creighton and entering the NBA draft. There were no breaks, no real moments to exhale. And when the reporters weren't surrounding him, Patton was posing for photos and accepting compliments as friends and family conveyed their elation and pride.

But the frenzy eventually dissipated and Patton got his moment to breathe again.

"How do you feel?"

"Fine," Patton deadpanned, not hesitating one bit. "I'm ready to get to work."

His mentors all chuckled, though they and anyone else who knows Patton can't ever be surprised to hear him clamoring for the next opportunity to get on the court.

That's been his mentality since his days roaming Omaha neighborhoods as a kid and it'll likely be his thought process if he's picked in Thursday's NBA draft. The 6-foot-11 center is projected to be a first-round pick — likely a mid-teens to early-20s selection — but really, for Patton, he insists that he has no preference on which franchise gives him a jersey to wear.

He'd rather just bypass all the hoopla, get a basketball and find a gym. Doesn't matter where or when.

Just hoop.

"Nothing changes in basketball," Patton said. "It's two points or three points. You shoot, you dunk the ball or lay it up. It's something that's never changed on me. I can always depend on it. If I need to get my mind off anything, it's there for me."

It's what defined his upbringing, according to Patton.

Some friends got into trouble. Others played football (he tried that, too). But mostly, for Patton, basketball was the pastime.

At a buddy's house. At the park. Belvedere Elementary had a rim. So did Patton's cousin, former Creighton Bluejay Donnie Johnson.

"They were kind of everywhere," said Johnson, who was then the boys coach at Benson High. "If you've got a hoop on the street, that's where everybody is."

Patton has not changed, either.

After he ended this past season at CU, he decided to get together with Bob Franzese, his AAU coach and longtime adviser. They'd planned just to eat dinner at home.

So Franzese put a few steaks on the grill, but the next thing he knew, Patton was headed to the courts at nearby Mission Park.

"I go over and they're in a full-blown pickup game," said Franzese, who'll be part of Patton's posse in New York City on Thursday.

Patton was known to sleep at the Creighton practice facility. He was too sick to practice one day this past season, so he FaceTimed a buddy who'd been watching from the sideline just to get a full report.

During his redshirt year at Creighton, Patton used to stop by Omaha North for open gym sessions. He'd play anywhere, really — Omaha Sports Academy and the on-campus Kiewit Fitness Center were often on his list. But North High was his favorite haunt.

There was one particular day when his high school coach, Jared Anderson, happened to pass through the gymnasium when Patton was balling with buddies from the block. And Anderson was cringing the whole time.

He saw Patton leap and get upended, his body splayed out before he crashed to the floor. Eventually, Anderson called Patton over.

You've got a budding career at CU, Anderson said. You have to be careful.

"I'll never forget, he looked me right in the eye and said, 'Coach, I appreciate that. You're looking out for me — but these are the guys I've been playing against my entire life,'" Anderson said. "These are my people here."

Pickup games like those, against the guys he grew up with, were the types of challenges, according to Patton, that molded, inspired and motivated him.

Patton is now Omaha's most decorated NBA draft prospect in nearly three decades. He starred at Creighton last season, earning the Big East freshman of the year award while nearly setting an NCAA freshman shooting percentage record.

But he's also not too far removed from being the lean and uncoordinated freshman who got teased for his fragility when he stepped on the court with the older dudes.

Tre'Shawn Thurman remembers this vividly. The former UNO forward who just transferred to Nevada was a year ahead of Patton, and when they went at it throughout their high school days, Thurman was constantly expressing one theme. Patton was soft.

"When I'm playing, I talk stuff," Thurman said. "It's nothing personal. But I talk. Every game. That wasn't me wanting him to be bad. It was me wanting him to be better, seeing if I could spark something inside him."

That's the thing about Omaha-bred basketball players, Thurman said. Whether they recognize it or not, they're all rooted in a culture of toughness. Even if you don't grow up in poverty, Thurman said, you still hit the national circuit in high school without star ratings or fanfare. You produce, and you're still doubted.

"Nothing was ever given to anyone who's grown up in Omaha (on the court)," Thurman said. "You have to earn everything, every bit of respect."

Patton realized this in the past year, too. He says he wouldn't be in the position he is in if it weren't for the guys who pushed him or the elders who guided him.

They pushed him to keep working. He adopted that philosophy as his own.

And that's why he wanted to return home just before the biggest day of his life this week. That's why he'll be sporting a bow tie and unique suit design that collectively pay homage to his city. He'll surely reference at some point on Thursday all the lessons learned in the Omaha gyms through the years.

"Omaha means the world to me," he said. "(It taught me) when I was ready to step out on the floor, I was going to be at my best. I've always believed in myself. And I've had a good support system and family who's always believed in me."

Former Bluejay standout Justin Patton returns to Omaha for perspective, may get in late workouts before NBA draft

By Jon Nyatawa / World-Herald staff writer Jun 19, 2017

Justin Patton has visited almost every corner of the country for team workouts, he's traded pleasantries with Magic Johnson and he's enjoyed the early perks of what NBA stardom can entail.

But he insists that this week — when he returned to his hometown to see family and friends on the cusp of the biggest night of his life — stands out as what he'll cherish most over the past two months of NBA draft prep.

He wouldn't be a probable first-round pick without the impact that countless Omahans have had on his life. So it's been meaningful to return to the city he knows so well.

"It's a jolt of energy," said Patton, who played at Omaha North before spending two years at Creighton. "I get re-booted and I get to rekindle all my emotions — get to talk about everything, get to look back on the past with my family. It's always good to reflect, come back and regroup. That's what I've been doing."

Patton won't be able to relax for long.

The NBA draft is Thursday. He'll be in New York City by Wednesday — and he indicated Monday that he might even squeeze in a couple of more workouts (with Miami and Milwaukee, maybe).

He's not sure what to expect. He's picked the brains of executives and gotten an idea from coaches for how he'd fit, but these teams typically don't show their hand before they're on the clock.

ESPN's Chad Ford projected that Atlanta will take Patton with the 19th overall pick. DraftExpress and Sports Illustrated have made the same prediction. CBS Sports' Gary Parrish projects Patton to go No. 15 overall to Portland, while his colleague Reid Forgrave says Brooklyn will take him at No. 22.

Patton has not paid much attention to any of it. And yet, the 20-year-old center said he's not nervous about Thursday.

He'll enter the green room without an idea of what team's jersey he'll be posing with later that night. But that's OK.

"With me, it's not really how high I go. It's really about the right situation," Patton said. "I'm not anxious about anything. I'm just ready to get to work."

He'll be sure to make the most of Thursday, though. Just as he's done throughout this pre-draft process.

He has met several notable figures around the league — most notably Johnson, the former NBA star and current Los Angeles Lakers president of basketball operations. That conversation came during the draft lottery last month. Johnson liked Patton's suit.

"He told me I look nice," said Patton, who plans to pay homage to Omaha with a new suit Thursday. "I gave the compliment right back to him."

Patton said he's worked out for Portland, Denver, Charlotte, Detroit and Atlanta, and he'd been training in Las Vegas before that. On Monday in Omaha, he stopped by Creighton's facility before heading to the College World Series to enjoy an afternoon with friends.

Whatever ends up happening Thursday, Patton said, he'll be ready to begin the next chapter.

"I have no expectations," he said. "Once I get there, I know I'll do the work to get where I need to be in the future. It's just about working hard, and when I get there, maintaining the level at which I play — which should be high."

Former Creighton star Justin Patton taking break from team auditions for NBA draft lottery

By Jon Nyatawa / World-Herald staff writer, May 16, 2017

Less than 24 hours after Justin Patton sat alongside his college coach and announced he'd be entering the NBA draft, the promising center boarded a plane for the East Coast.

And just like that, Patton was a pro.

He left the closely monitored regimen of college athletics — meeting Creighton teammates at the Championship Center for workouts, or stopping by the training table for a prepared meal or getting reminders to devote a certain number of hours to study hall. With no lengthy orientation period or extended stretch of time to gradually transition into this new lifestyle, Patton had stepped into the basketball business world.

Kind of strange, the 19-year-old admits.

"I've learned a lot about myself," Patton said last week at the NBA combine in Chicago. "I've learned that I'm a professional. It's weird to think that things could change from one thing to another so fast. But it is what it is. I'm at the professional level and I'm doing good at it."

He's on the move again this week.

He's set to be on hand for the NBA draft lottery, which takes place at 7 p.m. Tuesday in New Jersey. ESPN will televise the unveiling of the order of teams making the top 14 picks in next month's draft.

After that, Patton heads back to Las Vegas, where he's been training with Impact Basketball (a player development agency that has prepped prospects such as Kawhi Leonard and Karl-Anthony Towns). Patton has a pro day scheduled for June 2. Private workouts will follow.

"It is just a really critical five, six-week stretch for him — and it's really the first time you're truly a professional basketball player, where 24/7, that's what you're really devoted to," said Bob Franzese, director of Omaha Sports Academy and a longtime coach and mentor for Patton.

So far, Patton appears to be right in his element.

"Creighton prepared me a lot," he said.

All indications are that the fun-loving and outgoing 6-foot-11, 229-pound Omaha North graduate has approached these new experiences with the same optimism and confidence that he carried throughout his standout redshirt freshman season with the Bluejays.

Like back in November, when he was calling for the basketball while matched up one-on-one against Wisconsin's Ethan Happ, who would eventually earn a spot on the all-Big Ten defensive team for the second straight year. Or in January, when he calmly and cleverly shared his story with a group of curious New York reporters after a breakout game at St. John's. Or in March, when Patton rocked a bowtie at Madison Square Garden as he mingled with the league's top administrators and accepted the Big East freshman of the year award.

At the draft combine last week, Patton had NBA reporters chuckling several times during a 15-minute media session — both with his blunt certainty about his own potential and his on-the-spot one-liners. Patton presumably brought that same charm to the interview settings, meeting representatives of nearly a dozen franchises last week (including at least four that'll have their top 14 picks solidified Tuesday night).

"It's Justin, just being Justin," Franzese said.

Patton's had a little help, too.

He flew to New York right after declaring for the draft so he could sign with ASM Sports Agency. He's stayed in touch with former coaches and others who helped shape him during his youth — he and Franzese just met up for dinner last week.

And Patton said he's made it a point to repeatedly pick the brain of former Creighton star Doug McDermott, a first-round draft pick in 2014. They've talked a ton about staying disciplined and maintaining a structure in an effort to maximize work ethic, according to Patton.

Ultimately, that has been his primary focus: to stay in shape and to keep improving.

He's embracing each moment, making sure to enjoy himself. But the NBA draft is still more than a month away. He's not ready to get too comfortable.

"Maybe when I get the contract or when I walk on stage, I'll breathe a sigh of relief," he said. "But right now, I really haven't had time to smell the roses. I've just got my head down. I'm working right now. That's all I'm really worried about, is getting better every single day and winning each day."

Out The Mud

You probably don't know anything about Justin Patton—he doesn't have his own hashtag or a flashy highlight mixtape. But the do-it-all 7-footer from Creighton is a sure-fire first-round NBA Draft pick, so you'd better study up. Quick.

May 16, 2017, By Peter Walsh, Slam Online

Ever since LeBron popped up in the pages of our magazine, played nationally televised games on ESPN and graced the cover of Sports Illustrated, high school basketball players have been increasingly under the spotlight. By the time they hit the NBA draft, almost every North American-born lottery pick is known to basketball fans on some level. These days, the explosion of YouTube, highlight mixtapes and social media has made 16- and 17-year-old kids legitimate stars. High school man-child Zion Williamson has gone viral many times over and already earned a co-sign from Drake. Isaiah Washington, Ja'Quaye James, Jahvon Quinerly and a handful of other East Coast ballers formed #JellyFam and created a movement both on the internet and on the playgrounds. And you can't go a day without hearing about Lonzo, LiAngelo or LaMelo Ball.

This year's draft class is widely considered one of the best in the past decade. Throughout the past college season, there was a steady debate over who would go No. 1—Lonzo Ball or Markelle Fultz—and fans from Philly, Boston and Phoenix were already studying up on their franchise's next potential superstar. Despite the publicity and attention the top picks have garnered, there remains a very tall, relatively unknown 7-footer out of Creighton University who could, given his ridiculous upside, challenge for the title of top player in this loaded class.

Justin Patton, the rare player to declare for the NBA draft as a redshirt freshman, is projected to go anywhere between picks No. 10 and 20, depending on which mock draft site you favor. But it's likely you've never heard of him until very recently.

A quick Google search for "Justin Patton high school highlights" yields just two videos. One, from 2014, is a 45-second clip that shows a gangly, somewhat awkward Patton hoisting up mid-range jumpers during a practice. The other, from 2015, shows grainy footage of an explosive big man catching a lob off the backboard during one of his Omaha North (NE) high school games.

It begs the question: how did Patton go from a scrawny kid jacking up slow mid-range jumpers to a super-athletic, bouncy 7-footer that has NBA teams ready to make him a major piece of their franchise in the span of just a few short years?

For starters, a high school growth spurt took him from a 6-foot wing player to a 6-9 big man.

"I was 6-2 as a high school freshman and now I'm 7-feet tall," says Patton. "I grew seven inches my sophomore year. I had a little growth spurt. I don't think my game caught up to my body until my redshirt season at Creighton. [Before that year] I was falling down on the court and I would get tired easily. Now my conditioning has caught up with my growth and I feel like I'm a much better ballplayer than I was two years ago."

During his high school years, Patton played with the Nebraska-based OSA Crusaders on the AAU circuit, where his coach, Bob Franzese, saw the potential in him as a raw sophomore who still had a lot of work to do.

"I remember I was trying to find another player for our AAU program and I went and watched him play," says Franzese, "and I had a lot of people tell me he wasn't good enough as a 6-9, 6-10 sophomore. And I was thinking, Man, with the progress he has made, I think a year or two from now we could really have something."

Franzese told the same thing to the coaches at Creighton, where the staff—predicting that he would likely be a three-to-four year project—offered Patton a scholarship early in the summer of 2014. Patton said yes before head coach Greg McDermott could even finish his sentence.

It was the only D-I scholarship offer Patton received.

Later that summer, the rising big man's game started to blossom a bit and he showed flashes of dominance at tournaments. In the Crusaders' first major showcase of the AAU season, Patton displayed his explosiveness with tip dunks and blocked shots. As the summer progressed, more and more coaches began to show up at games.

"We went down to a tournament in Kansas City and played in front of 150 college coaches and Justin had the game of his life," says Franzese. "I'm thinking, OK, here we go, we're going to get 500 phone calls tomorrow. We didn't get one call."

Justin's big summer continued and the phone calls started to roll in, but his eyes never strayed from Creighton's CenturyLink Center. His commitment to Coach McDermott never wavered. For a hometown kid, playing at Creighton meant everything.

"Everyone in the state goes to the Creighton games—they drive from all over to see Creighton play," Patton says. "When you play there, all eyes are on you. We filled the gym with 18,000 fans every game. It's like no other playing there. Everyone is rooting for you—you'll be walking down the street and they'll be treating you like a God. It was fun being in that environment."

Patton's chance to prove himself took a little detour when he got to college, as he and the coaching staff decided that it would be best for him to take a redshirt year to develop and build on his skinny 200-pound frame. While hosting a recruiting visit with Class of 2016 guard Davion Mintz during Justin's redshirt year, Mintz, his father, Patton and McDermott were eating at a restaurant that overlooked the Missouri River. Following the dinner, the crew looked up facts about the body of water and learned that the part that flows through Omaha is called the "Big Muddy River," which prompted McDermott and Mintz's father to say, "Justin, since this is your city, we're going to call you Big Muddy." Little did the group know that Patton's true takeover of Omaha would come quicker than anyone could have anticipated.

Patton first started to turn heads on a national level when he scored 10 points and grabbed 7 boards in an early-season win over No. 9 Wisconsin last November. In a January game against St. John's, Patton scored 25 points, snatched 9 rebounds, dished out 4 assists and blocked a shot. His stock skyrocketed. The Bluejays started the season 18-1 and climbed as high as No. 7 in the polls before star point guard and National Player of the Year candidate Maurice Watson Jr went down for the season with a torn ACL.

With Watson out, "Muddy" became more of a focal point of Creighton's offense, frequently initiating the offense from the high post. The change meant Patton got to show off his versatility. Already known as a skilled post player and capable finisher at the rim off the pick-and-roll, the 7-footer flashed his handle, court vision and ability to step out and hit shots from both mid-range and three-point territory. JP finished the season with averages of 12.9 points, 6.2 boards and 1.4 blocks, while shooting 67.6 percent from the field for the 25-10 Bluejays.

Patton didn't begin to seriously think about declaring for the NBA draft until halfway through this past season, but with a new wave of stretch big men like Kristaps Porzingis, Karl-Anthony Towns and Joel Embiid taking over the game, his skill set—and untapped potential—gives him a shot at being a franchise cornerstone like the aforementioned stars.

"I feel like those players have a similar game to mine," Patton says. "I'm always trying to learn new things and I'm always watching those guys play and see how they do it at the highest level every day. I try to watch them and take pieces from their games and add it to mine."

Most one-and-done players are thrust into the spotlight at a young age and dubbed the next NBA superstar, often before they are old enough to fully grasp what that means and how much baggage comes with drawing such attention during their formative years. For Patton, growing and maturing late allowed him to analyze the landscape and see what has worked, and more importantly, what hasn't for other players.

"I feel like I got to grow up before all of this happened," he says. "A lot of these players, they go through this whole process and they're just kids and don't have the opportunity to grow up. I got to watch a lot of other people make mistakes and a lot of people prosper and I studied that. By the time I started to blow up, I was already a mature person and knew how to handle everything."

"I want to rise to the top," he adds. "I've always been someone that was never given a chance but made the most of everything they got. I hope and I will become one of the best in the NBA. That's one of the things I'm banking on right now."

NBA scouts recognize Justin Patton's skill; ex-Bluejay understands pro game is mental, physical task

By Jon Nyatawa / World-Herald staff writer May 13, 2017

CHICAGO — The message Justin Patton has heard from NBA teams isn't changing as he makes his way through the draft process.

Yes, he needs to add weight and strength. And yes, he has plenty to learn about schemes and systems. And yes, some of his skills need fine-tuning.

But there's still a reason why a dozen scouts were observing every night from the stands during the second half of his 2016-17 collegiate season and why Patton's schedule this week was full of meet-and-greets with front office personnel at the NBA combine.

Simply put, the sky is the limit for the 19-year-old from Omaha.

"My potential — it's unfathomable," Patton said. "I could go as far as I want to go."

He initially realized this during his year off, gaining confidence as he recognized the daily improvement as he redshirted at Creighton. Then he starred for a year with the Bluejays, averaging 12.9 points and 6.2 rebounds per game and earning the Big East freshman of the year award.

While Patton weighed his options following the season in March, NBA folks reached out to his coaches and mentors. The general theme of scouts' assessment: If a player's potential rate of progression is measured on a 1-10 scale (with 10 being the peak), Patton is currently at a 3 or 4.

How high he goes in the draft depends on whether teams believe he can eventually reach a nine, for instance.

"The fact that he's this good at so young of an age — the development curve seems to be a little bit higher," said Sam Vecenie, who covers the NBA draft for the Sporting News. "With Justin, I don't think anybody thinks he's a finished product ... but you're drafting him for what he could be at (age) 22."

Most analysts are projecting Patton to get selected somewhere in the middle of the first round. He could go even higher, if one team is willing to invest in that down-the-road payout.

In reality, every team will be taking a chance on June 22. There are no guarantees in the draft, even for the franchise that gets the first pick.

Phil Jackson, the legendary NBA coach and president of the New York Knicks, isn't sure anyone who'll be drafted next month is ready to compete at a championship level. Jackson told a small gathering of reporters between on-court workouts Friday that he thinks all prospects need time to develop.

"It's tough to come into this league at 19, 20 and expect to mature quickly enough," Jackson said.

Jackson said he ran into Magic Johnson on Thursday. They happened to briefly chat about the topic — how Johnson, now the Los Angeles Lakers president, was part of an NBA champion as a rookie, and how that's not as realistic today.

"Not too many kids can come into this league and win a championship like he did," Jackson said. "It's really tough — just the maturation level. Particularly the education of the game. The amount of work it takes. Physically, mentally. The preparation of it."

Patton certainly gets that.

His goal is to just keep working hard to one day put himself in a position to contribute meaningful minutes. And whichever team drafts him, Patton said, he'll find a way to maximize the opportunity.

"I'd be really excited to (play) for any organization," he said. "It's my dream to play in the NBA. And part of the feeling that I've made it is being at the combine. So it's been great. I'm excited to see what the next step is."

Former Creighton star Justin Patton relishes chance to meet with teams at NBA draft combine

By Jon Nyatawa / World-Herald staff writer May 11, 2017

CHICAGO — Former Creighton standout Justin Patton stood at the edge of the main court, his hands resting on hips and his shoulders rhythmically rising as he gradually caught his breath before one more sprint.

It was then that BYU's Eric Mika and Oregon's Jordan Ball jettisoned skyward in unison for the first jump ball of the day, signaling the start of the NBA draft combine's 5-on-5 drills.

And as Kansas' Frank Mason ran down the loose ball to begin the contest, the ever-competitive Patton — the Omaha product who almost never turns down a chance back home to step on the court and hoop with his boys — couldn't help but ponder what he'd do if, by chance, he had elected to pick up a basketball and step on the floor Thursday.

"I inserted myself in the game a little bit when I was watching it," Patton said with a smile. "I saw what I could do."

The fantasizing didn't last long, though. Participating in the live action — what amounts to a disjointed and somewhat erratic set of pick-up games — wasn't necessary for Patton, who's already projected by many analysts to be a top-20 selection in the NBA draft.

Several likely lottery picks weren't even in Chicago for the combine this week. Nearly half of the 67 players in attendance didn't play 5-on-5.

Patton wanted to be there, at least. To soak in the atmosphere. To experience a big-stage event. To interact with other potential pros. And to meet with as many teams as possible (the number was nine by midday Thursday).

He just had to be smart.

"Everything I do I think about it," he said. "I do the pluses and minuses. I'm thinking like a businessman."

So Patton spent most of his Thursday afternoon operating around the exterior of the main court.

Stations for vertical jump tests (Patton maxed at 30½ inches) and various agility drills (he completed the shuttle run in 3.31 seconds) were set up behind one basket. The three-quarter court sprint (which Patton finished in 3.46 seconds) stretched along one of the sidelines, behind the two benches. His overall performance was right on pace with the other centers in attendance.

He measured in at 229 pounds with 7.8 percent body fat. He was listed at 6 feet, 11¼ inches with shoes on. His standing reach (9 feet, 3½ inches) was the fourth-highest at the event.

But what was Patton most encouraged by? The interviews with team scouts and front office officials. He'd not met face-to-face with franchises before Thursday. It was his chance to leave an impression.

He said he sat down with four teams that will have a top-14 pick in the June 22 draft — Orlando, Denver, Dallas and Minnesota. He got together with Portland (No. 15 and No. 20), Chicago (No. 16), Milwaukee (No. 17), Oklahoma City (No. 21) and Cleveland (no pick). More meetings were scheduled for Thursday evening and

Friday.

"I've been a busy guy," Patton said.

One team asked him if he's the type to speed through a yellow light or come to a complete stop. Patton's response: "It depends on where I'm going."

When he was asked about his skill set translating to the next level, Patton was ready to list all of the reasons why he thinks he's suited for the new-age NBA. He's comfortable setting and reacting to ball screens, he can put the ball on the floor, he can shoot, he can pass and he understands the game.

He made sure to get an assessment for what kind of development plan each team had for him — he knows he's only tapped a small portion of his potential so far.

"I think I've taken good advantage of the interview process," Patton said.

Reporters quizzed him, too. For more than 15 minutes Thursday.

What do you plan to wear when you attend the draft? What do you think you bring to the game? What do you need to work on? If you were in the playoffs right now, how do you think you'd do to help one of those teams? What would it be like to play for (a certain team)? What'd you learn while redshirting?

Patton was ready for it all, which he indicated afterward was encouraging. He wasn't sure how he'd react to an event where Larry Bird sat courtside, and ESPN set up cameras everywhere and every single prospect suited up in the Under Armour jerseys was overloaded with talent.

"I've never been in this (setting), in the limelight, with other guys who're going to end up in the same spot you're going to be in," Patton said. "It's good to see everybody grinding and everybody with the same goal."

But this week is just part of a lengthy pre-draft process. The NBA lottery isn't until next week, so many teams' strategies have yet to be formed. Patton said he has a pro day scheduled. He'll start coordinating with specific teams to set up private workouts throughout June.

For now, though, he's pleased with what's transpired to this point.

"It's been a great experience," he said.

Shatel: Thanks for the memories, Justin Patton, and feel confident in Creighton legacy

By Tom Shatel / World-Herald columnist Apr 7, 2017 Updated 22 hrs ago (...)

Creighton's Justin Patton pursues NBA career
Omaha World-Herald

Thank you, Justin Patton.

The temptation is to be selfish today, Justin. To want another year to see where your game will go next, to have you again take us somewhere we haven't been before. To want just one more glimpse, one more game.

But you're gone, and it's absolutely the right decision, and so this is a day of celebration. Of thanks.

Thanks for the meteoric ride last year, and for taking us along. It was one year, but it was one heck of a ride.

Thanks for the alley-oops and the dunks, the 3-pointers and blocks, the introduction against Wisconsin, the show you put on at St. John's. Thanks for being a seven-foot extension of our hoop imagination.

Thanks for bringing the caravan of NBA scouts back to the CenturyLink Center, including former Milwaukee Buck Brian Winters, who must have voting rights in Omaha by now.

Thanks for being that phenom, touching the Creighton program with excitement and leaving local and national buzz in your wake. Thanks for doing all that with class and a humble, hard-working attitude. An Omaha kid, you bet.

Thanks for being that goof ball, those awe-struck eyes, and that smile, which told us it never got old to you.

And, certainly, thanks for your legacy, compacted into one season.

Legacy? In one year? Justin, we hardly knew ye.

How will Patton be remembered? Mostly, as a shooting star, a comet who flashed through the winter sky and was gone. Patton will be known more for what he does in the NBA than one freshman redshirt year at Creighton.

There was no Big East title, no Big East tournament title and a massive letdown performance in the NCAA tournament.

But Patton leaves an impact on Creighton and it should have lasting meaning.

The Jays have NBA ties and the three biggest names of late hang from banners in the school's championship center. Doug McDermott. Kyle Korver. Anthony Tolliver.

All played their senior years at CU, with McDermott choosing to bypass the draft as a junior.

In 1985, 7-foot Creighton center Benoit Benjamin was taken No. 3 in the draft. But Benjamin was a junior.

Patton is not a true one-and-done guy. He redshirted his freshman year.

But in one season he came from virtual unknown to being projected in the top 15-20 spots in this year's NBA draft.

That's called good advertising for Greg McDermott and Co.

Big-time recruits set their antenna for certain things. Going to a program that sends players to the NBA is big.

A program that sends a freshman redshirt to the NBA? Even better.

This isn't the Missouri Valley, the league where players stay together for four years. Patton's rapid rise and departure is another sign that Creighton is acclimating into the Big East just fine.

Losing great players to the NBA early is something that Big East teams do. Certainly, recruits will take notice.

Creighton already has a national player of the year on its Big East resume. Now, it's got an early NBA guy.

And, as Greg McDermott said on Wednesday, Patton and Doug McDermott are NBA guys at Creighton who were not highly-recruited. Translation: They were developed.

Mac can toot his horn there. Patton did the work, but there was a plan in place, including the redshirt year. And a Creighton coach who helped Patton and his family navigate the nuances of the NBA decision.

And in the end, the head coach sat side-by-side next to the player and supported his decision 100 percent.

Again, recruits will pay close attention.

In the end, Patton weighed the advice from various agents, NBA scouts (to McDermott) and former Omaha CEO David Sokol, who knows a thing or three about financing but I don't recall his jump shot.

Patton also took into account the possibility of spending next year in a small city or town in the NBA Developmental League. Patton says he fine with it, calling it "like a redshirt year."

What could he have become with one more year with buddy Khyri Thomas and Marcus Foster? CU will likely break in a new point guard next year. Big East teams would have known more about him but he would have known about them, too.

Meanwhile, NBA scouts would have looked at Patton as a third-year player, and probably nitpicked his game all season.

This year, Patton is an international man of mystery, full of intrigue and possibility and big-time marketability for an NBA team that needs to win or sell tickets.

He's also the right type at the right time: a hybrid center-small forward, a seven-footer who runs the floor and shoots three's and fits in just nicely in today's Golden State world.

How will he do? There are risks to leaving and staying. Ultimately, as Patton put it, "We decided it was time."

Congratulations, Justin.

There's going to be some natural disappointment for Creighton types, as next season would figure to be a lot better with Patton than without him. But that benefit is short-term compared to the bigger picture impact.

As McDermott said, "I'm pretty confident this won't be our last NBA player."

Chances are, he won't be Creighton's last underclassmen to leave for the NBA. There's a credibility that comes with that.

That's the legacy Patton leaves behind. And that's not bad.

THE KYLE MACY AWARD

Creighton's Justin Patton is the recipient of the 2017 Kyle Macy Award, which is presented annually to the top freshman in division I college basketball.

April 4, 2017

2017 KYLE MACY AWARD

PHOENIX, AZ -- Creighton's Justin Patton is the recipient of the 2017 Kyle Macy award, which is presented annually to the nation's top freshman

The Big East Freshman of the Year led Creighton in rebounds (6.2) and blocked shots (1.4) per game and was second on the team in points (12.9) per game. The second-team All-Big East selection also ranked second in the nation in field goal percentage (.676).

"Justin Patton had a phenomenal freshman campaign," said CollegeInsider.com's Angela Lento. "There were other freshman that had bigger numbers, but Justin's presence on the floor helped Creighton to a history-making season."

The native of Omaha, Neb. scored in double figures in 28 games this season, including four games with 20-plus. He was part of record-setting Creighton team, which established school records for points (2,864) and field goals (1.078) in a season.

The 1975 Indiana "Mr. Basketball" played his freshman season at Purdue University, averaging 13.8 points per game while leading the Boilermakers in free throws (85.9 percent for the season). He started in 25 of 27 games, helping them to a 16-11 season record.

After playing his freshman year at Purdue, Macy transferred to the University of Kentucky in 1976. He started every game for the Wildcats in 1977. A three-time All-America and three-time All-SEC player, Macy was a member of Kentucky's 1978 National Championship team. In his senior year of 1979-80, he became the first Kentucky player ever to be named consensus Southeastern Conference Player of the Year.

2017 KYLE MACY FRESHMEN ALL-AMERICA TEAM

Bam Adebayo	Kentucky
Bryce Aiken	Harvard
Jarrett Allen	Texas
Lonzo Ball	UCLA
Kamar Baldwin	Butler
Keith Braxton	Saint Francis PA
Miles Bridges	Michigan State
De'Monte Buckingham	Richmond
Zach Collins	Gonzaga
Jarron Cumberland	Cincinnati
De'Aaron Fox	Kentucky
Markelle Fultz	Washington
TJ Haws	BYU
Jonathan Isaac	Florida State
Josh Jackson	Kansas
Peter Kiss	Quinnipiac
Anthony Lamb	Vermont
T.J. Leaf	UCLA
Lauri Markkanen	Arizona
Malik Monk	Kentucky
Josh Okogie	Georgia Tech
Justin Patton	Creighton
Landry Shamet	Wichita State
Dennis Smith	NC State
Jayson Tatum	Duke
MaCio Teague	UNC Asheville

NOTE: Due a tie in the voting there is one additional player on the Kyle Macy Freshman All-America Team.

Top five moments in Justin Patton's Creighton career

By Jon Nyatawa / World-Herald staff writer Apr 6, 2017 Updated 22 hrs ago (...)

Creighton's Justin Patton pursues NBA career
Omaha World-Herald

It only lasted a year, but Justin Patton's Creighton career was certainly incredible to witness. And it was full of some brilliant and jaw-dropping highlights.

Coach Greg McDermott said it Thursday: "While he was only here a short time, he had a huge impact on our program."

Patton is definitely a player that CU fans won't ever forget.

Below are five of our favorite Patton moments from 2016-17:

5. TIP-IN AT XAVIER

The Jays trailed 67-66 with less than a minute left in the Jan. 16 game where they lost veteran Maurice Watson to injury. They'd blown a double-digit lead on the road and seemed destined to suffer a heartbreaking defeat. But then Patton soared out of nowhere to tip in an errant Marcus Foster shot and put Creighton ahead. CU won the game, 72-67.

BIG MUDDY #GoJays #TakeFlight #BIGEASThoops pic.twitter.com/PvLm9kYiXD
— Creighton Basketball (@BluejayMBB) January 16, 2017

4. DUNKING VS. 'NOVA

Creighton was down nine points with 10 minutes left in a top-10 matchup against the reigning national champs on Dec. 31. CU needed a spark. Patton provided it. He threw down two straight alley-oop dunks — the second of which came on a designed play against Villanova's zone defense. The game was tied two minutes later (though CU did end up losing the thriller).

Alley: Maurice Watson Jr. OOP: Justin Patton #GoJays #TakeFlight #BIGEASThoops pic.twitter.com/3VVV4akTO7
— Creighton Basketball (@BluejayMBB) December 31, 2016

Zierden tossed an oop from Omaha North High School. Patton put it down. pic.twitter.com/DfABTcKvsQ
— Josh Planos (@JPlanos) December 31, 2016

3. BLOCK PARTY VS. XAVIER

Another Jays' loss here on Feb. 4 — but the sequence in the first half where Patton blocked two consecutive shots on the same possession still stands out. He finished with a season-high five swats in that defeat. The CenturyLink Center crowd loved each one of them.

You are cordially invited to Justin Patton's Block Party at @centurylinkoma. RSVP via @CreightonTix. #GoJays #TakeFlight #BIGEASThoops pic.twitter.com/bBBsPHc78L
— Creighton Basketball (@BluejayMBB) February 4, 2017

2. DOMINATING ST. JOHN'S

When Patton pulled up and drained a 3-pointer late in the first half back on Jan. 4, you could almost feel the exasperated St. John's crowd throwing up its hands and asking, "Is there anything he can't do?" Patton put on a show that night, displaying all aspects of his game. He scored 25 points on 11-of-14 shooting.

Road wins never come easy in #BIGEASThoops.

Justin Patton was the difference though, powering @BluejayMBB to a win with 25 at St. John's. pic.twitter.com/q59EfN1TD8
— #BIGEASThoops (@BIGEASTMBB) January 5, 2017

1. BEATING WISCONSIN

This was Patton's coming out party. Particularly in the second half, when he went toe-to-toe with talented forward Ethan Happ and never backed down. In fact, Patton was at one point calling for the ball so he could go right at one of the best interior defenders in the country. Patton only finished with 10 points, but it was evident after the Nov. 15 win over Wisconsin that he was in store for a breakout season.

These back-to-back buckets by RFr 7-footer Justin Patton, showcasing the skills pic.twitter.com/JmK6P0PITB
— Jon Nyatawa (@JonNyatawa) November 16, 2016

Its Point Guard Injured, Creighton Turned to Justin Patton, Its Freshman Center

By ADAM ZAGORIA MARCH 17, 2017

When Creighton lost its star point guard, Maurice Watson Jr., to a season-ending knee injury in January, its season almost went down with him.

Until then, the Bluejays had looked like a potential Final Four contender — a deep, balanced and well-coached team that had started 18-1 and was ranked No. 7. But without Watson, the Bluejays nearly cratered. They lost seven of their final 12 regular-season games in the Big East and fell out of the Top 25.

Something needed to change, and the solution turned out to be right there in plain sight: the redshirt freshman Justin Patton.

Patton, an easygoing 7-foot 230-pounder, averaged 13.1 points, 6.2 rebounds and a league-leading 69.4 percent shooting. But more important, he became a critical offensive piece — and a competent distributor out of the high post — for the Bluejays (25-9), who are the No. 6 seed in the Midwest Region and face Rhode Island (24-9) on Friday.

“We’ve had to use Justin in a different way,” Creighton Coach Greg McDermott said. “He was getting a lot of easy baskets earlier in the year in transition and off ball-screen situations that aren’t coming quite as easily without Maurice. And we’ve had to use him more as a facilitator, where we use him more on the top of the floor as a passer and a ballhandler.

“We’re playing through him out of the post more than we did earlier in the year. So he’s been asked to do a lot for a young player.”

Patton is a late bloomer in other ways, too. Partly because he played for a summer team that was not associated with a major sneaker company, Patton had only one scholarship offer coming out of Omaha North High School in Nebraska. It came from McDermott, and Patton said he had accepted Creighton’s offer “instantly — it might not even have been 30 seconds.”

“I think they saw exactly what you’re seeing now: a 7-footer who’s highly skilled, who runs and jumps and blocks shots,” said Bob Franzese, the general manager of Omaha Sports Academy, who was also Patton’s Amateur Athletic Union coach. “I think they saw a more raw version of him several years ago.”

Patton is now projected as a first-round N.B.A. pick. He will not turn 20 until June 14, about a week before the draft.

“It’s going to be fun to see how this carries out, and see how a player’s going to be made out of me,” he said.

Creighton University

Justin Patton Named BIG EAST Freshman of the Year

Patton becomes first Bluejay men's basketball player to earn the award since Doug McDermott in 2010-11

by Rob Anderson

(M) Basketball

Posted: 3/8/2017 3:30:00 PM

NEW YORK, N.Y. – Creighton center **Justin Patton** has been announced as the 2016-17 BIG EAST Freshman of the Year. Patton is Creighton's first Freshman of the Year since Doug McDermott was recognized by the Missouri Valley Conference following the 2010-11 campaign.

A 7-foot center, Patton leads Creighton with 6.3 rebounds and 1.5 blocked shots per game, and is second on the club with 13.1 points per game. The Omaha, Neb., native owns 65 dunks during his redshirt freshman season, which has helped him rank second nationally in field goal percentage (.693) and on pace to shatter the all-time NCAA field goal percentage record by a freshman. Patton owns 26 games of 10 or more points this season, including three games of 20 or more. He was previously a unanimous pick to the All-Freshman Team, and a Second Team All-Conference choice.

Patton is the second Creighton basketball player to earn league Freshman of the Year honors this winter, as Jaylyn Agnew was honored with the women's award. It's the first time since 2010-11 (Doug McDermott, **Carli Tritz** in the MVC) that Creighton swept both Freshman of the Year honors in its league.

Creighton (23-8, 10-8 BIG EAST) returns to the floor on Thursday at 8:30 p.m. Central when it meets Providence in the final BIG EAST Tournament quarterfinal.

BIG EAST Freshman of the Year History

1979-80: David Russell, St. John's
1980-81: Fred Brown, Georgetown
1981-82: Patrick Ewing, Georgetown
1982-83: Earl Kelley, Connecticut
1983-84: Dwayne Washington, Syracuse
1984-85: Charles Smith, Pittsburgh
1985-86: Dana Barros, Boston College
1986-87: Derrick Coleman, Syracuse
1987-88: Sean Miller, Pittsburgh
1988-89: Brian Shorter, Pittsburgh
1989-90: Nadav Henefeld, Connecticut
1990-91: Billy Curley, Boston College
1991-92: Lawrence Moten, Syracuse
1992-93: Othella Harrington, Georgetown
1993-94: Doron Sheffer, Connecticut
1994-95: Allen Iverson, Georgetown
1995-96: James "Scoonie" Penn, Boston College
1996-97: Tim Thomas, Villanova
1997-98: Khalid El-Amin, Connecticut
1998-99: Troy Murphy, Notre Dame
1999-00: Troy Bell, Boston College
2000-01: Eddie Griffin, Seton Hall
2001-02: Chris Thomas, Notre Dame
2002-03: Carmelo Anthony, Syracuse
2003-04: Chris Taft, Pittsburgh
2004-05: Rudy Gay, Connecticut and Jeff Green, Georgetown
2005-06: Dominic James, Marquette
2006-07: Scottie Reynolds, Villanova
2007-08: DeJuan Blair, Pittsburgh and Jonny Flynn, Syracuse
2008-09: Greg Monroe, Georgetown
2009-10: Lance Stephenson, Cincinnati
2010-11: Cleveland Melvin, DePaul
2011-12: Moe Harkless, St. John's
2012-13: JaKarr Sampson, St. John's

2013-14: Billy Garrett Jr., DePaul
2014-15: Angel Delgado, Seton Hall
2015-16: Henry Ellenson, Marquette
2016-17: Justin Patton, Creighton

NOTE: The award was called Rookie of the Year through the 2014-15 season

Creighton's Previous Men's Basketball Conference Freshman of the Year Honorees

1995-96: Rodney Buford, Missouri Valley Conference
1997-98: Ryan Sears, Missouri Valley Conference
2007-08: P'Allen Stinnett, Missouri Valley Conference
2010-11: Doug McDermott, Missouri Valley Conference
2016-17: **Justin Patton**, BIG EAST Conference

Justin Patton - Freshman of the Year



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For 4:30 p.m. Release

**Villanova's Hart Selected BIG EAST Player of the Year
Creighton's Patton Tabbed Freshman of the Year
Butler's Holtmann Named Coach of the Year**

NEW YORK – Villanova guard Josh Hart, a senior leader for the Wildcats' 28-3 regular-season record and fourth straight BIG EAST regular-season title, has been selected BIG EAST Player of the Year. Creighton freshman center Justin Patton has been named BIG EAST Freshman of the Year and Butler head coach Chris Holtmann was tabbed BIG EAST Coach of the Year. The winners were selected by a vote of the league's head coaches, who were not permitted to vote for their own players.

Hart, a 6-5 senior from Silver Spring, Md., is considered a top candidate for National Player of the Year honors. Known for his all-around skills and full-throttle playing style, Hart has averaged 18.6 points and 6.5 rebounds going into this week's BIG EAST Tournament. He is first in the BIG EAST in scoring with an 18.6 average. In league games, he won the BIG EAST scoring crown with an 18.2 mark. His 6.5 rebound average in all games ranks fourth in the league. He is sixth in steals at 1.5 and ninth in assist/turnover ratio at 1.7. He is one of only two players in Villanova history to amass at least 1,800 points, 700 rebounds, 250 assists and 150 steals. The other Wildcat to reach those milestones is Kerry Kittles, who was the BIG EAST Player of the Year in 1994-95. Hart won the Dave Gavitt Trophy as the Most Outstanding Player as a sophomore in the 2015 BIG EAST Tournament. He is the first BIG EAST player to win the Dave Gavitt Trophy before earning BIG EAST Player of the Year honors.

Patton, a 7-0 center from Omaha, Neb., has made an immediate splash with the Bluejays and helped his team compile a 23-8 record and 10-8 BIG EAST mark. He is averaging 13.1 points and 6.3 rebounds while shooting an impressive 69.3 percent from the field. His field goal percentage ranks third in the country and he's on pace to set the NCAA record for a freshman. He has shot better than 54 percent from the floor in 30 of 31 games this season. In BIG EAST play, he broke the freshman field goal shooting mark, making 66.3 percent. In all games, Patton's rebound average ranks fifth in the BIG EAST and his 1.5 blocked shot mark is fourth. Patton is only league freshman to earn all-conference honors, being named to the All-BIG EAST Second Team.

Holtmann has directed Butler to a remarkable season with a 23-7 overall record and a 12-6 BIG EAST mark. Picked sixth in the BIG EAST coaches' preseason poll, the Bulldogs finished second and will be the No. 2 seed in this week's BIG EAST Tournament. This season, Butler owns a 6-2 mark against ranked teams with five of the wins coming against teams in the top 15. This week, the Bulldogs are ranked No. 18 in the Associated Press poll. On Sunday, Butler is expected to receive its third straight NCAA Tournament invitation. Holtmann's three-year record at Butler is 68-29 (.701). In six seasons as a head coach, Holtmann is 112-83 (.574).

BIG EAST Player of the Year
Josh Hart, Villanova

BIG EAST Coach of the Year
Chris Holtmann, Butler

BIG EAST Freshman of the Year
Justin Patton, Creighton

How late growth spurts spawned some of college basketball's most talented big men

Henry Bushnell, The Dagger Mar 1, 2017, 10:35 AM

Just two years before he began tearing up college basketball, two years before he became the leading scorer on a national championship contender, and two years before he appeared in NBA mock drafts as a potential lottery pick, TJ Leaf could barely walk.

He wasn't injured in the traditional sense. There was no one play that caused him to hobble, no anguished howl on the court hours earlier. But as he trudged out of the gym, Leaf was in pain.

"After every game, after every practice, it was almost just hard to walk back to the car," he recalls on a recent Monday afternoon. "Sophomore, junior year, it was terrible."

In between games during the middle years of his high school career, Leaf sometimes wasn't even able to practice. He'd sit off to the side with ice bags on both knees. At times, his mind would race, and perhaps even wander toward self-pity. He'd wonder: Why can't I just be able to go work out? Why can't I be able to go play pickup right now?

But the same reason he pondered those questions, the same reason the ice was on his knees, the same reason the walks to the car were so arduous is one of the reasons Leaf, now a freshman forward at UCLA, averages 16.8 points, 8.7 rebounds and 2.6 assists per game for the third-ranked Bruins.

At the time, the 6-foot-10, 17-year-old Leaf hadn't been 6-foot-10 for long.

The growth spurt began in earnest during his freshman year. Leaf, who had played on the wing all his life, sprouted from 6-foot-1 in eighth grade to 6-foot-4 as a high school freshman, and ultimately to 6-foot-10 by his junior year. As he grew and adjusted to his new body, the pain intensified.

"It sucked for a while," he says matter-of-factly.

Eventually, though, the pain subsided, and finally evaporated. The pre-spurt skills, on the other hand, never did. The passing, the dribbling, the foot speed, the shooting — they've carried over from Leaf's guard days, and have turned him into one of the most versatile, multi-talented players at this level of the sport.

"Now," he says of the growth spurt, "I wouldn't trade it for anything."

And although the development arc sounds unusual, Leaf isn't alone. As the game trends more and more toward pace-and-space, and as power forwards and centers with guard-like skills become more and more coveted, a striking number of college basketball's best big men have become invaluable assets to their teams in part because only a few years ago, they weren't actually that big at all.

The Creighton athletics weight room is lined with dumbbells and barbells, lifting racks and plates, exercise balls and jump ropes, and everything in between, and it was here, in June of 2015, with sunlight streaming through the windows on one side, that Justin Patton's Creighton career began. The Bluejays' athletic performance staff puts every incoming freshman through a variety of tests to gage core strength, hip flexibility, vertical leap and a wide range of other attributes. The results of the tests set a baseline for the years of training to come.

But when Patton, who had measured in at 6-foot-11, 204 pounds, reached the bench press and saw 185 pounds loaded up, ready to be lifted, there was a problem.

Patton couldn't lift 185.

Head strength coach Dan Bailey recalls having to modify the test because Patton, who turned 18 that month, was so underdeveloped physically.

And he was so underdeveloped physically because three years earlier, he was in the same position as Leaf. He never had the pain Leaf did, but he was in the process of growing seven inches in one offseason, from 6-foot-2 to 6-foot-9 in between his freshman and sophomore seasons of high school.

Patton's path from 6-foot-2 shooting guard to 7-foot NBA prospect illuminates both the benefits and challenges of such a growth arc. Not only did Patton's weight and strength not follow his height; not only was he unable to fit into the same pair of clothes for more than a few months; Patton, to some extent, had to re-learn basic skills like running and walking.

"It seems easy," Patton explains, "but it's hard when you just grow so tall. Just running down the floor, I was tripping, I'd fall over my feet. Or if I got hit, it's like a tower got knocked down."

Others have experienced similar difficulties. Significant growth spurts can affect coordination. Vanderbilt's Luke Kornet, who grew from 6-foot-2 to 6-foot-10 between his sophomore and senior years of high school and didn't stop growing until he was 7-foot-1 his sophomore year of college, remembers rolling his ankles a lot. He, like Leaf, had joint pain, and sometimes struggled to lift his legs when trying to run.

When Kornet arrived at Vanderbilt, he couldn't squat 90 degrees. "It took a while to adjust to my body before I was really able to start getting more athletic and stronger," he says. But Kornet, now a senior, transformed his body, overcame the side effects of the growth spurt, and now averages over 13 points and 6 rebounds per game on a Commodores team that is charging toward the NCAA tournament bubble. Kornet dropped 21 on Kentucky Tuesday night in a near-upset.

Patton's body had to undergo a similar transformation. At 204 pounds, "He was not ready to play in a college game," says Creighton coach Greg McDermott. The former four-star recruit redshirted his first year on campus, and dedicated himself to the lifting regime. "While everyone else had game day," Bailey says, "Justin's game day was in the weight room."

A big part of the transformation was Patton's diet. "Everyone loves to eat," he says, "but if I had something else to do, I wouldn't eat." Through recovery shakes, protein bars and proper nutrition, Creighton's dietitians laid out a plan for Patton to take in as many as 6,000 calories per day. In a year-and-a-half, he put on 29 pounds while decreasing his body fat by one percentage point.

Once he did, the skills he had displayed as a middle-schooler in Omaha reemerged in a frighteningly skilled 7-footer as comfortable running a fast break as he is around the basket.

For Patton, the skills "naturally carried over." Others have experienced a similarly quick re-learning curve. For some, ball handling suffers simply because of the increased distance between hand and court. For others, shooting is hindered. But re-honing the skills is easier than honing them for the first time.

"I attribute my passing skills, and the stuff that you don't see normal big men do, all to growing up [as a guard], and my dad grinding me out on ball-handling drills," says Wisconsin's Ethan Happ, who went from 5-foot-9 in eighth grade to 6-foot-6 in 10th. "Then when I grew, I just maintained that."

Leaf ascribes his exquisite footwork to his days as a guard too. When he catches and faces up to a defender in the post, "my first step is a lot faster than people realize because I grew up as a guard trying to get past that defender [on the perimeter]."

Says Kansas State's Dean Wade, who grew from 5-foot-10 in eighth grade to 6-foot-6 his freshman year, and who is the Wildcats' most efficient offensive player: "I don't know how, but [the footwork] kind of came natural to me."

Wisconsin coach Greg Gard, who has helped three guards-turned-big men — Jon Leuer, Frank Kaminsky and now Happ — develop into all-conference talents, says the transition from the perimeter to the post is far more natural than a move in the opposite direction. "A lot of the perimeter skills," Gard explains, "in terms of footwork, passing, decision making, feel for the game, can be applied to playing with your back to the basket."

The results speak for themselves. Of college basketball's top 20 or so big men, at least six or seven experienced massive growth spurts after growing up as guards. St. Mary's' Jock Landale, who was 5-foot-11 at the onset of his freshman year of high school, is second in Ken Pomeroy's Player of the Year rankings. Leaf is the best scorer on the most efficient offense the sport has seen over the past two decades. Happ is the second best player in the Big Ten, and leads Wisconsin in every major statistical category. Patton could be a lottery pick. Richmond's T.J. Cline, who jumped from 5-foot-9 as a high school freshman to 6-foot-8 as a senior, ranks 12th nationally in assist rate; he's the only player in the top 100 taller than 6-foot-6.

The phenomenon extends to the NBA too. All-Star Game MVP Anthony Davis was a 6-foot-3 guard at the beginning of his junior year of high school. Then there are former college stars like Kelly Olynyk, who redshirted as a junior at Gonzaga to conquer the residual physical effects of his high school growth spurt.

With more and more teams now prominently featuring small-ball lineups, stretch-fours, and now even stretch-fives, have become more and more valuable, and thus the unique skill sets engendered by these late growth spurts are more and more useful. "When you have a player like that, much like Kaminsky was, you can really run your offense through them," Gard says. "Because they're such good passers, they have a feel for the game, they see the rest of the floor, the game slows down for them."

All of this begs the question: How do coaches evaluate tall high schoolers who grew up as guards? Are they more intrigued by a late growth spurt? Is it something they even specifically look for?

"Absolutely," says McDermott, whose son, Doug, was also a late bloomer. "The ability to handle the ball and pass the ball, for a frontline player, is very valuable. And while there are good passing big guys, anybody who grew up handling the ball more, and passing and catching and doing all the things you do out on the perimeter, it's really gonna help you in the post. So it's always very intriguing when you have someone who played guard most of their life, and they have a growth spurt and they can use those skills to be effective on different parts of the floor."

Recruiting, Gard points out, is an inexact science, and even more so when trying to project players who haven't grown into their bodies. Plenty of players who hit huge growth spurts don't pan out. Some are plagued by injuries. Others never get over the physicality they meet in the paint.

Gard, despite his program's success with players like Leuer and Kaminsky, doesn't go as far as McDermott does. "I would say we're intrigued by it," he says. "I wouldn't say we necessarily go hunt for it. It's more by accident that this has happened."

But even if he doesn't hunt for it, he's drawn to the type of player that a late growth spurt can spawn. When he and his staff see a player with good size and perimeter skills, they start delving into his background. When they learn of the spurt, everything clicks. "Then what you see," he says, "what you evaluate, starts to make sense."

Justin Patton's Meteoric Rise Has Creighton, and the NBA, Dreaming Big

by C.J. Moore, Bleacher Report

January 24, 2017

OMAHA, Neb. — Justin Patton used to walk through Creighton's locker room during his redshirt freshman season and make pretend phone calls to NBA scouts and representatives at Nike negotiating his shoe contract.

Patton looked the part of a future lottery pick—a mobile 7-footer with a 7'3" wingspan and a feathery touch—but to think he'd get there soon belonged in the land of make-believe. Lottery picks do not redshirt as freshmen. Nor are their identities unknown to most scouts.

When Patton verbally committed to his hometown college team the summer before his senior year of high school, the locals were stumped. On a Creighton message board thread at the Bluejay Underground discussing his commitment, the second response is from a fan posing the question, "Walk-on?"

"People think I'm lying when I say that I had never heard of him, and I live in Omaha," said Nick Bahe, a former Creighton player who now does color commentary for Fox Sports 1 and has a radio show in town. "The high school is 20 minutes away from my house, and I had never heard of him. I had to call the Creighton staff and ask, 'Who is this guy?'"

Everyone in town knows Patton now. His ascension in the first two-plus months of the season—13.7 points per game on 71.8 percent shooting, 6.5 rebounds and 1.6 blocks per game—has him rocketing up draft boards and is a big reason why No. 16 Creighton was ranked higher last week (seventh) than at any other time in school history.<http://bleacherreport.com/images/pixel.gif>

Patton hit the same kind of genetic lottery that turned Anthony Davis into the ideal modern big man. Like Davis, Patton was a late bloomer. He was just 6'2" as a high school freshman and had spent most of his playing time at guard as a youth.

That's why he's comfortable out on the perimeter but can also score in the post, finish alley-oops above the rim, pass, dribble, block shots and defend a guard in a switch.

"He is everything except the brand name," an NBA scout told Bleacher Report. "If you went off only this year, you would have to argue he's the best big-man prospect in the draft."

Three years ago, that didn't seem possible. Patton wasn't a phenom waiting to be discovered; he wasn't even that good.

Jared Andersen, the newly named head coach at Omaha North High School, spied his big man in the stands at a pro-am game in Omaha. Justin Patton was nowhere to be found on any recruiting websites, but his growing frame promised an athleticism Andersen would need.

"Let's see if you can go dunk that," Andersen told Patton, who was about to begin his junior year.

The problem was that Patton was wearing flip-flops.

"He couldn't do it," Andersen said. "He's in flip-flops and he's cold, but he's 6'6". You'd still think he'd be able to do that as a 16-year-old."

Patton was so awkward growing into his body—from 6'2" to 6'10" in the span of three years—that one day during passing period he gashed his forehead open walking through a door. He would fall so much during games that his mom would tell him "try to stay off the floor this game."

"People kept telling me to hold your own," Patton says. "Even the coaches would tell me, 'Justin, quit being soft.' I can't help it. I'm literally like a stick. If you push me over, I'm going to move because I'm not big."

Patton struggled to keep the weight he did gain because he was constantly sick. "My doctors were telling me it happens with the growth and your body just has to catch up," he said. "I would not eat because I didn't feel good, so then I would lose weight."

His first few games under Andersen were no more inspiring. Reporter Jacob Padilla said the first time he saw Patton during his junior year, he air-balled three of his first four shots.

"He finished with 10 points against a team with a 6'3" center," said Padilla, who covers Omaha high school basketball for Nebraska HS Hoops.

But in the spring of his junior year, Patton finally started getting used to his body. He was the same height and weight for more than a month, and he was dominating for the first time in his life at his high school's open gyms.

Former Nebraska-Omaha assistant coach Randall Herbst, who witnessed one of these open-gym sessions, told Andersen, "Coach, this is going to get crazy with him, because 6'9" guys aren't supposed to be able to have footwork like that and show those skills."

In early June 2014, Andersen took his team to the Creighton team camp.

"He was averaging, like, 25 points, 18 rebounds, five blocks, running the floor, dunking everything," Andersen said. "He put that show on for six games. It was every game. The first couple games it was maybe a couple Creighton coaches watching. By that last game, every single Creighton coach was watching. And he was doing it again and again."

Creighton head coach Greg McDermott wasted no time. He invited Patton, his AAU coach Bob Franzese and Andersen in for a meeting before the camp ended.

McDermott showed Patton a highlight video—the package, Andersen remembers, was mostly Doug McDermott from his 2013-14 National Player of the Year campaign—and offered Patton a scholarship.

"For Justin, who was a versatile big guy, he saw it and he liked it," Andersen said. "But it wouldn't have mattered. He was ready to go regardless. They could have showed him anything. They could have showed him a cartoon."

Patton committed on the spot:

Patton's high school stats at Omaha North

	MPG	FG%	PPG	RPG	BPG	Team record
2012-13	19.6	.500	6.6	5.1	1.0	13-10
2013-14	27.1	.448	11.7	7.9	2.5	8-15
2014-15	24.8	.524	14.1	9.9	3.6	23-4

Over the next few months, he broke out on the AAU circuit. Scout.com recruiting analyst Evan Daniels rated him a 5-star prospect after watching only two games in Las Vegas.

"Had he gone out on the circuit in July and did what he ended up doing, we would have fought everybody in the country for him," McDermott said.

It wasn't always so easy for Patton to impress.

Despite his developing physical gifts, Patton tested Andersen's patience in their first season together at Omaha North. Frustrated that he could not find a way to get his big man to realize the level of intensity he needed to maintain, Andersen finally put a chair in the corner of the court during a practice his junior year.

Essentially, Patton was given a timeout.

"You've got your 6'10" best player, who's [acting like he's] 12 or 13," Andersen said.

Patton was not a bad kid, but there was an innocence about him that made it difficult for him to see the path he needed to be on. Take AAU basketball, for instance. The first time his AAU team traveled by air to Las Vegas for a tournament, Patton and his coaches almost missed the flight because they couldn't get Patton out of the car. "He'd never flown before and been away from his mom and his brother," Franzese said.

At the Orleans Hotel in Vegas that week, Patton had an ice cream cone in the lounge area. Franzese asked him where he got it. "The servant gave it to me," Patton told him.

"The servant?" Franzese questioned. "The servant? What in the hell are you talking about?"

Patton pointed to a waitress.

Part of Creighton's plan was to allow him to take a step back and see the big picture. So instead of playing limited minutes off the bench as a freshman, McDermott and his staff opted to redshirt Patton his first year at school, which was an unusual decision considering where he ranked as a recruit.

In the Scout.com database, which dates back to 2002, Patton is one of only two 5-stars to redshirt as a freshman for reasons other than academics or injury—former Wisconsin center Brian Butch, class of 2003, was the other.

"If we were going to get him to where we thought we could, he needed to make a lot of changes in his life," McDermott said.

For one, he ate like, well, a kid. Patton's diet had been big on french fries and fried foods. (Patton's eating habits were so poor that his AAU program has since mandated what their players eat between games.)

McDermott took Patton to Spaghetti Works in downtown Omaha before the 2015-16 season, "just so I could get him a good pasta meal and start to send the message early," he said. He laid out a nutrition and workout plan for Patton, who weighed 205 pounds at that time. (He's now 233 pounds.)

Then came work on his game. During skill work early last season, assistant coach Darian DeVries set up a camera on Patton so he could show him that his effort was not good enough. Patton would tell DeVries he was going hard, then DeVries would show him the tape.

Once Patton figured out how to work, the growth was rapid.

"He's unreal," DeVries said. "When we do skill workouts and we throw something at him—you've mastered this; now let's try this—he's like a sponge. He takes it, absorbs it and then he can go do it. That'd be a fun quality to have as a player."

Patton's recruiting rankings by service

	Stars	Rank
Scout	5	24
Rivals	4	45
ESPN	4	Unranked
247Sports	4	87
B/R		

Last summer Patton lived in the gym. Literally. He spent most nights sleeping at the Creighton practice facility along with fellow Omaha native and teammate Khyri Thomas.

<http://bleacherreport.com/images/pixel.gif>"We'd wake up at 3 or 4 in the morning and go hoop," Patton says.

Taking into account his rise from redshirt season to potential lottery pick, an argument could be made that Patton is the most improved player in the country.

"He had flashes last year but not anything to this level of consistency," McDermott said. "You could see signs of it. But in terms of his skill level and what he's doing now, it's all come together in a hurry."

When senior point guard Maurice Watson Jr. fed the ball to Patton at practice earlier this month, he shouted "lottery pick" before each delivery.

Watson gave him the nickname shortly after they returned from winning the Paradise Jam in the U.S. Virgin Islands, where Patton missed just five shots in three games with plenty of scouts in attendance.

"Sometimes you have to speak it into existence," Watson said. "The more he hears it, the more he's going to go that way. ... He's got the personality and the imagination for it."

Patton admits that at first he was in denial when people started floating the idea he was a future NBA player. And the type of player he's become is not what he ever envisioned.

Even last fall when Creighton's coaches were asking him to get physical during a low-post drill, Patton questioned McDermott.

"I told him I've never played that position before," Patton said. "What have you got me doing?"

McDermott told him to trust him, pointing out every decision he had made thus far—from signing him to redshirting his freshman year—had paid off.

Indeed, the improvement has been steady this season, highlighted by an early-January signature performance at St. John's (25 points, nine rebounds and four assists). Patton even scored two baskets that night on post-ups. McDermott reminded Patton afterward of his hesitancy to embrace becoming a true 5-man. "That looked pretty good tonight," he told the freshman.

Patton is putting together combinations in the post that look as if he's spent years mastering them. On one sequence against St. John's, he faked middle over his right shoulder off the catch, then started to spin toward his left shoulder, went back to the right shoulder, pump-faked and then scored with a lefty jump hook.

Adding to the difficulty of defending a true 7-footer with footwork and touch is that he prefers defenses try to take away his strong hand.

Patton broke his left hand during his freshman year of high school, and when it healed, he made the decision to start doing daily tasks, such as eating, with his left hand along with spending a lot of time in the gym trying to get the feel back. He ended up developing a softer touch with his left than his right.

"I make jokes. This is my dunking hand," Patton said, pointing to his right hand. "You can tell the calluses are all bigger on this hand."

Patton is arguably the best lob catcher and finisher in the country, providing the Creighton guards the luxury of knowing they can deliver it to Patton at any trajectory and he'll catch it.

"His hands and the quickness of his release are some of the attributes that Doug had around the rim," McDermott said, referring to his son, who was a three-time All-American. "You wondered how he always got it off and it was always soft. Justin gets it off quick. He catches everything. He's an extremely talented young man."

Patton has also developed into a capable passer, able to deliver everything from lobs for alley-oops to crosscourt skip passes to three-point shooters to pinpoint bounce passes to cutters for layups.

McDermott said his offense is evolving every game as Patton takes off, expanding into different areas where he can get him the ball and exploit defenses.

Patton's confidence is growing, too, especially in his jumper. He changed his shot right before the season when assistant Jeff Vanderloo pointed out it was flat. Patton moved his release to the right to help him create more arc. Through 20 games, Patton is within range of the NCAA single-season shooting record (74.6 percent) set by Oregon State's Steve Johnson in 1981.

The final touch to make Patton a two-way monster is getting him to dominate the defensive end. Patton has the length and athleticism to be one of the nation's top shot-blockers, but he averages only 1.6 blocks per game.

"He can be an elite defender, and he's shown signs of that but just hasn't been consistent," McDermott said. "And part of it is we want him to run the floor every time. We ask him to do a lot, and you only have so much energy. And he's young and he's not used to that." <http://bleacherreport.com/images/pixel.gif>

The daily growth in Patton's game makes the Bluejays a legitimate threat to go on a deep run in the NCAA tournament, even with the recent loss of Watson to a torn ACL. The rapid improvement also has scouts scratching off any questions they may have had about Patton, especially since Big East play started. In conference games, he's averaging 15.9 points, 6.7 rebounds and 1.7 blocks per game.

"You're looking for him to fill out," an Eastern Conference NBA scout said. "Continue to hone his jump shot. Improve his body and gain strength. Hold his ground and battle against NBA size. That's really it."

Some scouts also wonder how Patton will handle the coming attention. With typical lottery picks, they've been under the microscope for years with scouts evaluating them at camps and all-star events. They've believed for years that they were pros.

When Patton first saw his name on anything NBA draft-related, he offered a warning:

There are those in Patton's circle who believe he should be willing to consider another year.

"He's fortunate to have Coach McDermott, who has had a young man go through that process," Franzese said. "It's fun to talk about, but it can't happen until the time is right, and those guys will know."

So maybe the timing is uncertain. But it's not often a big man comes along with Patton's combination of size, skill and mobility.

"You're not kidding, man," another Eastern Conference scout said.

It appears Patton may be signing that sneaker deal sooner than anyone thought.

Inside the rapid rise of Bluejays big man Justin Patton

by Seth Davis, Sports Illustrated
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In June 2014, Creighton coach Greg McDermott invited Justin Patton to take a tour of the campus and meet in the coach's office. Patton had just completed his junior season at Omaha North High School, which is located four miles from Creighton's campus, so he had been to the university countless times. He had no reason to believe this visit would be different—that is, until McDermott surprised him by offering a scholarship. "I accepted instantly. He couldn't even get the sentence out before I said yes," Patton recalls. "I didn't have any other offers. I was just sitting there hoping that I could play at this school."

Last week, Patton returned to McDermott's office for a much different kind of meeting. McDermott had invited Patton, his family and his AAU coach to discuss how they should handle the quickly escalating speculation over whether Patton, now a 7-foot redshirt freshman center for the seventh-ranked Bluejays, will enter the NBA draft this spring. McDermott has long sensed that Patton had that kind of potential, but he could never have imagined it would be realized so quickly. "When he first got here, he was so far away from being able to play in a college game," McDermott says. "I've never coached anybody who has come as far and as fast as he has done it."

That is quite a statement considering McDermott's son Doug, who also played for Greg at Creighton, evolved from being a lightly recruited high school player out of Ames, Iowa, to the 11th pick in the 2014 NBA draft. Doug, however, took four years to make that ascent. Patton has traced that same arc at warp speed, and he is still barely tapping his potential. At 7 feet and 230 pounds, Patton has the agility and coordination that is usually found in guards, a tantalizing blend that is the result of a late growth spurt. He excels at tip dunks and delicate passes. He can put the ball behind his back in the open floor and finish the pick-and-roll with authority. He runs the floor like a gazelle. His touch is so deft around the rim that he is making 72.7% of his shots (which ranks third in the country) while averaging 13.8 points, 6.6 rebounds and 1.7 blocks. Through Creighton's first 19 games, Patton has made five three-pointers and tallied 24 assists and 20 steals. He had 47 of the team's 87 dunks. And he has done it all with the joie de vivre of a carefree 19-year-old college kid who knows he is holding a winning lottery ticket.

Or, to put another way, a ticket to the lottery. Patton had his coming out party on Nov. 15, when he scored 10 points and grabbed seven rebounds in 29 minutes during a 79–67 win over Wisconsin. Ever since then, NBA scouts have flocked to his games, and they have come away greatly impressed. "I mean, holy moly. He runs the floor, he's got good hands, he can shoot a little bit," one Eastern Conference scout says. "He had a play against Xavier where he stole the ball, put it behind his back and passed it ahead to a guy for a layup. Guys his size should not be able to do stuff like that. He's going to have a decision to make [about turning pro] if he keeps playing like this. At this point, he'd be the second- or third-best big man in the draft at worst."

Patton's abilities will be even more critical now that the Bluejays' starting point guard, Maurice Watson Jr., who was leading the nation in assists at 8.5 per game, has been lost for the season after tearing his ACL on Monday. If past is prologue, Patton will exceed expectations. He was average height for much of his childhood, so when he started playing basketball he was usually a shooting guard. Unlike many young big kids who are pushed into basketball because of their height but never really love to work at it, Patton has long had a passion for the sport. His love for the game was fostered during regular trips to watch Creighton play at CenturyLink Center, where he would sit in the top few rows and wonder if he would ever be good enough to step on that floor.

Patton's life started to change dramatically when he was around 14 years old. Between the end of his freshman season and the start of his sophomore season in high school, he shot up from 6' 2" to 6' 9". Bob Franzese, who runs a local youth basketball program called Omaha Sports Academy, watched Patton during his sophomore season at Omaha North and invited him to try out for his traveling AAU team. Justin was lanky and raw, but he was still impressive. "In our first tournament he had four tip dunks," Franzese says. "I called Darian DeVries [an assistant coach] at Creighton and said, 'I don't recommend a lot of players, but you have to look at this guy.' From there, they performed their due diligence and did a phenomenal job recruiting him."

Patton had a lot of growing up to do off the court as well. His first big tournament for OSA was in Las Vegas. That was the first time he had ever stepped on a plane. Franzese recalls having to wait a long time for Patton to say goodbye to his mother and step out of the car. He had some decent moments at that event, but he was awkward, out of shape and totally lacking lower body strength. His mom used to joke that she would give him fifty bucks if only he could get through a game without falling down.

Patton's high school team always got a free invitation to McDermott's summer camps at Creighton, so the coaching staff there had plenty of opportunities to monitor his progress. Even after watching him throughout his junior season, McDermott wasn't sure what to make of him. "He wasn't a dominant player, but you could see occasional signs of maybe what was to come," he says. Once Patton got better control of his body, he became more of a force, but he was still a project. Later that spring, Franzese took his team to a national tournament in Kansas City. With hundreds of Division I coaches looking on, Patton played superbly. Franzese was sure he would be getting a ton of phone calls from recruiters. Instead, he got none. "It was odd," Franzese says. "The guy was 7 feet tall, but everybody missed him."

McDermott, however, had the luck of geography. Once he saw Patton dominate at Creighton's camp later that summer, he decided to make the scholarship offer—the first and last Patton received from a Division I school. Franzese got plenty of phone calls after Patton stood out at a prestigious national tournament later that summer, but Patton told his coach to let everyone know his commitment to Creighton was unwavering.

After Patton arrived on campus, McDermott started to consider the possibility of a redshirt season for his freshman. As a June baby, Patton was already young for his age. Not only did he need to develop his game and his body, he was also going to receive limited playing time behind 7-foot center Geoff Groselle, a fifth-year senior. Patton was skeptical of the idea at first, but after he played just six minutes and struggled during an exhibition game against Upper Iowa, a Division II school, he was fully on board.

The decision to redshirt proved necessary to develop Patton's growth away from the court as well. He needed to learn how to train and how to practice. He needed to appreciate the importance of sleep and a good diet. "He would eat french fries seven days a week three meals a day if he could," McDermott says. Mostly, he needed to build up his strength. Patton, who weighed a spindly 200 pounds when he stepped on campus, had never lifted weights before. He dove into a rigorous strength and conditioning program that included downing protein shakes in an effort to gain weight. At first, the shakes were 260 calories each, but Patton has worked his way up to 1,300-calorie drinks. As a result, he has gained 30 pounds of muscle.

Midway through last season, Patton could feel his work paying off during practice. "It wasn't every day, but there were some practices last year where he just made spectacular plays," McDermott says. Patton spent last summer in Omaha continuing to train and play in open gyms around town. As his redshirt season began, he felt confident and effective, and he surprised himself by how well he played in a closed scrimmage against Missouri. Even so, as Patton was sitting in the players' lounge talking about the upcoming season with Watson and 6'3" junior guard Marcus Foster, he told them he hoped he could be a valuable supporting player this season. They replied that they thought he could be something more.

Their prediction panned out that night against Wisconsin, and Patton has been improving ever since. He evinces the classic traits of the late bloomer, which has drawn comparisons to Pelicans star Anthony Davis. Having learned the value of working hard and being coachable, Patton is not likely to abandon those habits just because he is enjoying his first taste of success. If anything, his delayed progress has given him a deeper appreciation of how far he has come. "Creighton was always my dream school," he says. "I went to all those games, and I was sitting so high up I couldn't even hear the ball bounce. Now, I'm playing and there's a kid up there watching me."

The more things have changed, the more he has tried to stay the same. The message McDermott delivered in his office to Patton and his family last week was not all that different than the one he gave the day he surprised Justin with a scholarship: Work hard. Stay humble. Trust your coaches. Most of all, keep your inner circle tight. Patton says several agents who hope to represent him in the NBA have approached him, both directly and through friends, but each time he has referred them to McDermott. Patton knows he will have a big decision to make when the season ends, but until then he wants to do all he can to help Creighton get to the Final Four. Still, it's hard to blame him if his head drifts into the clouds every now and again. "It's unreal that I'm in this position," he says. "Coach Mac is always telling us not to get distracted. But who doesn't get distracted when the future is so bright?"