

# Big man on campus (Literally)

## AVC's 7-foot freshman Dedmon impresses coach with commitment to improving skills

By GREG WAGNER  
Valley Press Staff Writer

LANCASTER — The first time Dieter Horton met Dewayne Dedmon, there wasn't much to get excited about.

"I saw bad feet, bad hands and a young man who did not understand his body," the Antelope Valley College men's basketball coach said. "I saw all arms and all legs and big feet. His body was all over the place."

As raw as any basketball player could be, Dedmon quickly altered Horton's opinion.

After watching that first, discombobulated workout upon meeting Dedmon, the coach told the eager high school senior to come back the next day.

So he did, 25 minutes early.

"For about a month straight, he was the first one in the gym, sitting here waiting for me," Horton said. "From the very second I said 'Yes,' he was basically in our face nonstop, wanting to learn and get better."

"It really caught my attention."

The 7-foot Dedmon soon caught the attention of the Division I college basketball world, receiving more than two dozen scholarship offers — all for a player whose entire basketball life spanned eight games in two months at Lancaster High School.

The progress Dedmon made is virtually unheard of. Without even stepping on the floor for the first time as a college basketball player, the center had orally committed to USC.

"He picked it up faster than anybody I have ever coached," Horton said.

Dedmon had plenty of reasons to be so devoted to earning a spot with the Marauders. He finally had his chance to play basketball and he wasn't going to see it go to waste.

He had been banned by his mother from playing team sports throughout high school. His mother is a Jehovah's Witness and didn't want sports detracting from the time Dedmon spent being involved with the religion.

He had played the game with friends at parks and on blacktop courts and knew he enjoyed it. Only until he turned 18 his senior year was Dedmon able to play, because he no longer needed his mother's approval.

"I was making my own decisions," he said.

The same youngster Horton saw struggle in that initial workout wasn't allowed to play much at Lancaster. Then 6-foot-8, he was so behind in basketball concepts and plays, coaches kept him on the bench until mopup duty.

That may have been his role early at AVC last season, but Horton told his pupil the best chance for success would be to grayshirt. So, all Dedmon did was practice, working to make up for lost time.

"When I'm at practice, that's what I focus on — I know I'm behind, I need to get this," he said. "I try to make everything I do crisp, so I can speed up the process."

That he did, turning himself into a shot-blocking post presence, a practice squad player on his way to becoming more heavily recruited than the starters.

Most of Horton's players have been involved in team basketball

See DEDMON on C3

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from the time before they turned 10. So, Dedmon had to squeeze nearly a decade and hundreds of games of experience into a year and a half's worth of workouts to ready himself for his first-ever season-opening start last month.

"I actually forget (about his inexperience) sometimes because of the way he performs," AVC point guard Rod Singleton said.

A daunting task, Dedmon easily assimilated into team basketball.

Horton said he just has the mind for the game.

"His brain may be his greatest attribute, he's so sharp and so smart," the coach said. "You tell him to do something once and you never have to tell him to do it again."

Of course, there have been growing pains.

Dedmon fouled out of his first three games. Never before having to worry about the officials' whistle, he didn't realize the proper amount of aggression required on defense.

He is averaging 9.3 points and 8.3 rebounds in the early stage of the season, needing to develop a better feel for his offensive post moves.

"Every day I come out here I realized I've improved," Dedmon said. "But even though I'm better, I feel what I am now is what I should have been then, so I have to improve even more."

He is well aware of his goal — to be ready to play Pacific-10 Conference basketball in two years.

"He has every tool to be a major player at the Division I level, but AVC is where he needs to first use those tools and become comfortable with them," Horton said.

Dedmon said his mother wasn't mad at him for deciding to play basketball when his age offered him that freedom. He said she respected his decision, more or less because she had to accept it. He has since moved out and is living on his own in the Valley to play the game he loves, with his mother gradually accepting it. He said she even is planning on attending Friday's opener of the Rancho Vista Shootout at Marauder Gym.

"Now when we talk about basketball, she has a little smile on her face," he said.

gwagner@avpress.com