

# Sports

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**ONE-ON-ONE:** South Carolina Ravens coach Cory Hatten drives Anderson-area players Fredrickus Madison, left, and Dajun Martin, right, to Columbia each week-end so they can play for his AAU team.

Eva Prado/Staff

# AAU ball teaches basketball and life skills

## Local tournament to feature state's top young athletes

Beginning this month, William and Cory Hatten resume their weekend role as part father-figures, part coaches.

**BY GARY HYNDMAN**  
contributing writer

From March to August each year, the two brothers, who grew up in Anderson, coach the South Carolina Ravens, three Amateur Athletic Union basketball teams based in Columbia. Their charges are middle-school-aged basketball players from across South Carolina.

The Ravens, along with other top AAU teams, will compete in the 4th annual Anderson Invitational, March 16-18 at several local venues.

Though it eludes the attention of most sports fans, AAU basketball quietly attracts and grooms the state's top talent. Its elite travel squads of boys and girls, ages 7-19, are stocked with future college players.

The University of South Carolina's Brandon Wallace, who recently set the

school record for most career blocks, honed his skills on an AAU court. Clemson commitment Laron Dendy, USC recruits Devan Downey, Michael Holmes and Mike Jones, and Dutch Fork High's Murphy Holloway, rated as one of the top prospects in the country, all have AAU experience.

Even Shaun Ellis, the former Westside High football and basketball standout who is now an All-Pro defensive end with the New York Jets, played for William Hatten's Ravens as a gangly youth.

Developing the potential of amateur athletes has been the AAU's mission since its inception in 1888. Today, it sponsors programs in more than 30 sports, involving more than 500,000 competitors.

None is more popular than girls' and boys' basketball, which have earned a reputation for preparing athletes to compete at the collegiate level.

In a January interview with the *Anderson Journal*, Katrina Goss, Westside

High's all-state post player, credited AAU ball with helping her develop as a basketball player. Goss has signed a letter of intent to play for the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga.

Bobby McGowens, head basketball coach at Laurens High, said the level of competition sets the AAU game apart. Where high school teams may have one or possibly two outstanding players, virtually everyone on an AAU team can play.

"The competition is really tremendous," he said.

As a senior, McGowens and two of his teammates, Chris Lindsey, and his brother, Chris McGowens, led McDuffie High School to the AA state basketball championship. Coincidentally or not, all had played previously for Hatten's Ravens.

Bobby McGowens was named AA State Basketball Player of the Year and went on to star in basketball and football at South Carolina State. He credits AAU

### WANT TO GO?

**WHAT:** Anderson Invitational AAU Basketball Tournament

**WHEN:** March 16-18

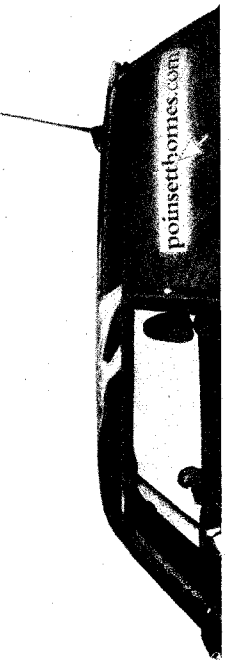
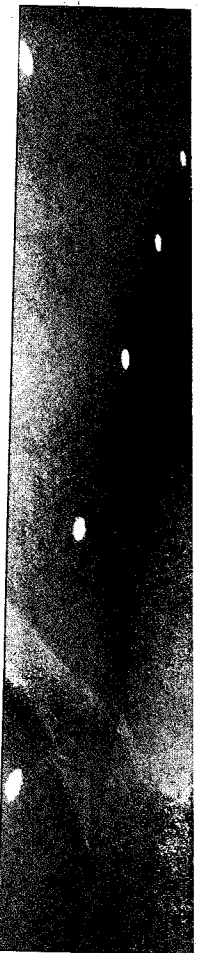
**WHERE:** Anderson Recreation Center, Westside High School, Westside Recreation Center

**COST:** Weekend pass, \$12;  
Day pass, \$5

For more information or to help support AAU basketball, call William Hatten at (803) 728-3679 or Cory Hatten at 934-9066.

ball with making him a better player. McGowens has rounded up support from Laurens community leaders to field an AAU team this year. All of his high school players will participate.

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"I know what it can do for you as a player and a person," he said.

It's the latter that's a priority for the Hatten brothers.

"Basically, (we) try to teach them about responsibility and growing up," said Cory, who works for Bi-Lo in Anderson.

Both brothers played basketball for McDuffie High. While coaching the Ravens appeals to their love of the game, it also affords them an opportunity to reach at-risk youth.

Many of their players today come from disadvantaged backgrounds deprived of male role models. Some are experiencing academic and personal problems by

the time they attend their first Ravens' practice.

As a volunteer coach with the Southwood Middle School football team and city of Anderson's recreation program, Cory keeps his eyes peeled for promising young athletes to recruit for the Ravens.

Each weekend six months a year, he drives with his local players to Columbia where they join his brother and the other Ravens for practice and tournaments played around the region.

In Columbia, some of the players stay at William's home. On the road, they share motel rooms.

During those uninterrupted hours, the Hatten brothers assume the role of surrogate fathers, teaching lessons about

character that will sustain their players off the court.

"I've got to help my brother save those kids," said William who is arena supervisor and intramural director at Columbia's Benedict College.

Chester's Devan Downey, for example, was already an exceptional basketball talent at the time he joined the Ravens. But he was also enrolled in an alternative school for students with behavioral problems.

William took the boy into his home on weekends, working with him on his attitude as much as his basketball skills.

Downey turned his life around and earned a basketball scholarship to the University of Cincinnati. After disain-





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**TOP TALENT:** Ravens coach William Hatten calls Southwood Middle School's Fredrickus Madison, pictured above, the best 8th grade basketball player in the state. Hatten said Madison's Ravens teammate, Dajun Martin, is a good enough athlete that he will compete for the starting quarterback's job at Westside High next fall as a freshman

guishing himself as one of the country's top point guards during his freshman season, he transferred to USC where he's expected to take over for departing Tre' Kelley next year.

"He may be a better person than he is a basketball player," William said.

It's those success stories that keep the Hatten brothers involved in a program they say doesn't get the support it deserves.

Even with a Nike sponsorship, they need \$30,000 per year for van rentals, lodging, entry fees and other expenses. The costs parents can't bear, they absorb themselves.

Proceeds from next weekend's tournament will benefit the AAU program. William addressed Anderson City Council recently, appealing for community leaders to waive tournament gym rental fees as an investment in the area's youth. At the time of publication, he had received no response.

"Either these kids are going to be good and go to college," William said. "Or they're going to be bad and go to prison."