

MASSAPEQUAN OBSERVER **SPORTS**

# The Surf Brings Pro Basketball to LI

By Leslie Feffer

Corey Williams, Lamont Jones and Shawnelle Scott. Even if you're a diehard pro basketball fan, these names may not yet be familiar to you. But all three are members of the Long Island Surf, the same team that launched Anthony Mason's career as a New York Knick, and may very well be playing in the NBA next season.

The Surf, who are part of the 11-team United States Basketball League, are based in Oyster Bay and play their home games at Hofstra University. The USBL season runs from mid-May (after the collegiate season) until mid-July (before the start of NBA rookie and free agent camps), which is the optimal time for NBA and Continental Basketball Association scouts to check out the players in this professional league.

In fact, longtime New York Knicks scout (and former coach) Andrew "Fuzzy" Levane, along with other NBA scouts, has been a courtside regular at Surf games for the past five years. After watching Mason play for the Surf in 1991, Levane recommended that he be brought to the Knicks' free agent camp that summer, and the rest is history. Mason is not the only Knick who has played in the USBL—Charlie Ward played for the league's Jacksonville team the summer before he joined the NBA. Other notable USBL alumni now in the NBA include: Charlotte's Tyrone "Muggsie" Bogues and Houston Rocket Mario Elie.

Levane, who anticipates bringing one or more Surf players to the Knicks' camp in July, also praises the entertainment value of the league, in terms of "great athletes playing a good brand of basketball." USBL games are strictly played according to NBA rules, which is both good training for the players and enjoyable for pro basketball fans.

The Surf's head coach, ex-Celtic Cedric "Cornbread" Maxwell knows that the USBL isn't "the caliber of the NBA, but you still have some 'diamonds in the rough' who possibly can get there." He believes that some of his players may be wearing NBA jerseys next season.

Assisting Maxwell with his coaching duties are player/assistant coach Arthur Agee, who was prominently featured in

the highly-acclaimed movie *Hoop Dreams*, and shooting coach Kiki Vandeweghe, a two-time NBA All-Star and former New York Knick. Kiki's sister, Tauna Vandeweghe, is the Surf's general manager. Tauna is a two-time Olympian in swimming and volleyball, and has worked as a television sportscaster.

Besides playing 26 games a season, the players and coaches are active in various community services. These include visits to schools and organizations. The Surf also founded its own Youth Outreach Program, to provide school-age youngsters with positive role models, through a series of basketball clinics preceding Surf home games. Besides teaching basketball skills, outstanding basketball superstars emphasize the importance of sportsmanship, education, drug and alcohol avoidance and career planning. The Youth Outreach Program is funded by a group of individual and corporate host/sponsors, whose contributions are then matched by the Surf. The Surf's main goal is not only to provide quality entertainment, but to serve the community as well.

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