



Who is John Hegwood?

If you hop onto the I-90 and drive 25 miles southeast from downtown Chicago, you will find yourself in the city of Gary, Indiana (population 98,000). Bordering Lake Michigan, Gary was founded in 1906 by the United States Steel Corporation as the home for its new plant. For the past five decades, the US steel industry has been confronted with tough economic challenges and today you will find Gary facing numerous difficulties including unemployment, major economic problems, urban decay, and a high rate of crime.

Gary is the hometown of the famous entertainment family, the Jacksons. Rumors abound that it is also the basketball capital of the world. It is here that the story of John Hegwood begins.

Hegwood grew up playing both baseball and basketball. At age 11, he was watching a college game on TV when he told his mom that she was going to watch him play college basketball on TV one day. She believed him.



As a freshman and junior, Hegwood didn't play conventional fundamental basketball and a lot of coaches who saw him play didn't like his style. They told him he was too flashy. As a result, he played his first two years of high school ball at the Boy's Club in Gary where Coach John Hall embraced his talents. As a sophomore, Hegwood joined his Theodore Roosevelt High School (*photo at left*) team – home of the Panthers – and spent the first few games on the bench.

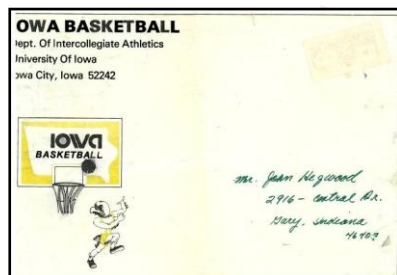
Photo at right: The Gary Roosevelt High School 1978 city championship team. Hegwood is in the back row, fourth from the left.

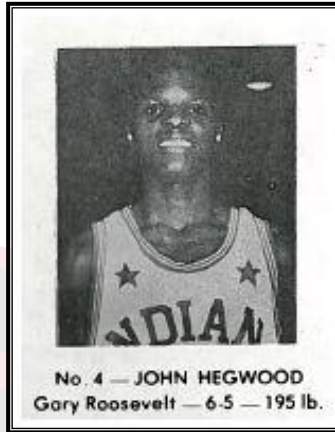
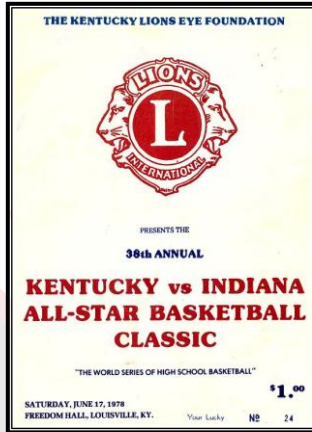
When he was in 11th grade, Hegwood took the place of a starting senior who had been released from the team. That summer he went to the University of Iowa camp where he recognized his potential as a basketball

player when he was chosen as a



camp all-star along with Isaiah Thomas (who would later star for the Detroit Pistons). Two weeks later he got his first college letter from Coach Lute Olson at the University of Iowa. Hegwood still has that envelope today (*at left*).





In 1978, Hegwood participated in the 38th Annual Kentucky vs Indiana All-Star Basketball Classic. Wearing the #4 jersey, the 6-foot-5, 195 lb Hegwood may have been one of the state's most under-rated players early in the year, but word of his talent soon spread and he wound up on several all-state teams. He was averaging 22 points and 18 rebounds per game. Hegwood ended his career at Roosevelt as a High School All American by making the Indiana All-State team, whose alumni include Larry Bird and Oscar Robertson.

The scene was now set. Hegwood believed that if he could get out of his hometown he could do anything he wanted.

The recruitment letters started to come in non-stop – 150 a week. He had so many letters that he gave them to his teammates so they could get recruited. He wanted them to be successful too and all six seniors on his basketball team received college scholarships.

He chose the University of San Francisco, the number one school in the nation at the time, where he starred in both basketball and baseball (pitcher) and studied physical education. Hegwood spent his first year on the coast playing for City College of SF while improving his grades. While there, he was designated a Junior College All-American and inducted into their Hall of Fame. During his time at USF, Hegwood was a first team All-West Coast Athletic Conference (WCAC) player and was named an All-American.



Rolando Blackman towers over USF's John Hegwood.

Photo at right: Rolando Blackman and John Hegwood (Kansas State vs. San Francisco 1981 NCAA Tournament).

Hegwood experienced March Madness first hand when he played in two NCAA tournaments and it was



at USF that Hegwood played alongside seven-footer Bill Cartwright of the NBA's Chicago Bulls. At the end of college in 1982, Hegwood was drafted by both the Toronto Blue Jays and the San Diego Clippers (now the LA Clippers). He preferred the pace of basketball so the decision was easy.

He went to the Clippers training camp and played in San Diego briefly. At the suggestion of his agent, he went to the Philippines to play where he toured Asia and China for a year. The next year he went to



South America and played in Santa Fe, Argentina, playing his first game an hour after landing from a 14-hour flight (*photo on previous page, at bottom left*). Argentina was his home court for eight years.

While playing in Argentina, Hegwood spent his off-seasons in San Francisco and a friend introduced him to Calgary. Off he went to the great white north to play in the World Basketball League (WBL) where he was reunited with Chip Engelland (former 88's star and current assistant coach of the San Antonio Spurs) with whom he had played in the Philippines.

Remember Calgary in 1988? Calgary hosted the Winter Olympics and the Calgary Flames won the Stanley Cup. Calgary was a happening place with a reverence for sport pop culture. The 1980s introduced sports exclusive networks that delivered sports 24/7 and the NBA was in the midst of some glory years by delivering the best basketball on a regular basis.

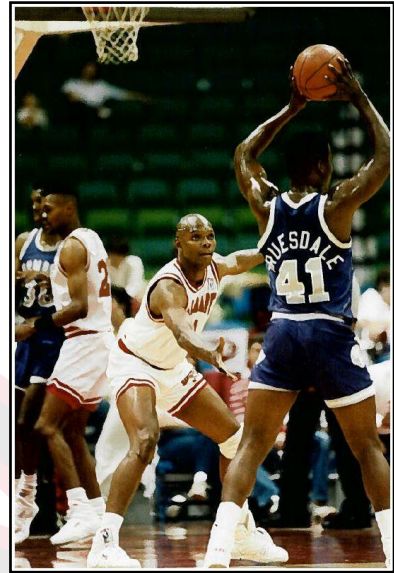


Photo at right: Hegwood playing with the Calgary 88's.



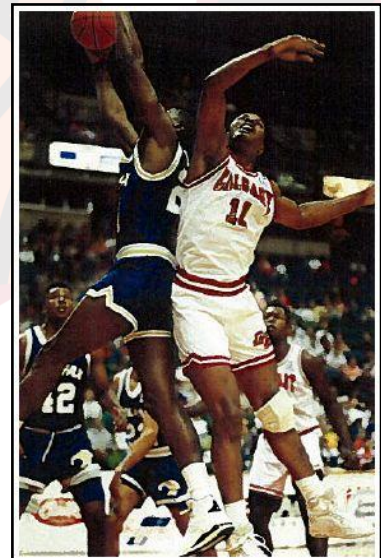
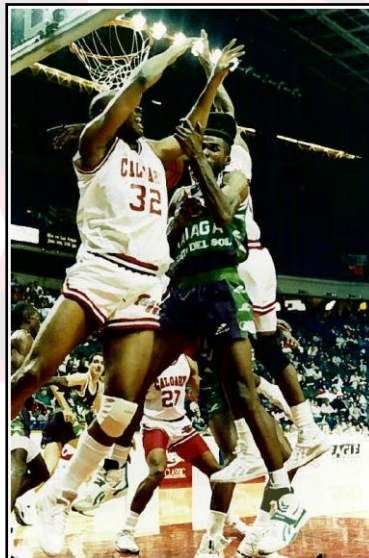
In Calgary, the widespread success basketball was enjoying came to life in the form of the Calgary 88's of the WBL. Founded in 1988, the WBL was originally a 6-foot-5 and under league that began with six teams located in both Canada and the US. The league ended up lasting only five years, but during those five years Canadian cities such as Calgary, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, and Halifax were introduced to many incredibly talented basketball players from other parts of the world.

Hegwood joined the Calgary 88's in 1989 (*photo at left*). The 88's were talented, the league was full of former NBA players, and the calibre of play was high.

Photo at right: Hegwood playing with the Calgary 88's vs an international team from Spain.

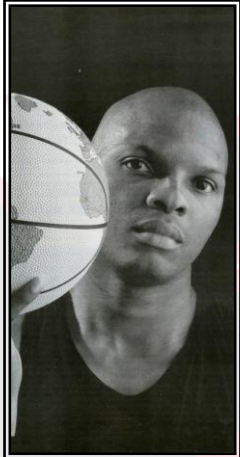
Photo at far right: Hegwood playing with the Calgary 88's vs Halifax.

Making the height cut-off at 6-foot-5 (and at 220 pounds), Hegwood played in the number 4 forward position, a position with an emphasis on rebounding, defence, and moving the ball around on set screens. 88's Coach Roger Lyons said that "John has always been a good defensive

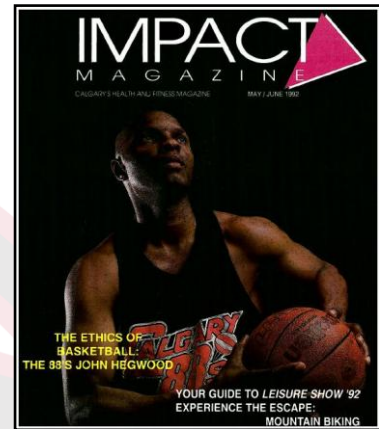




player...he finished second in the league in rebounding, so he can play. He gives us great flexibility and he's the type of character guy I like to have." In 1990, Hegwood led the WBL in blocked shots with a 1.3 BPG average.



An injury in 1991 was to play a role in Hegwood's future. During the off-season in 1992, while rehabilitating from a partially-torn ligament in his knee, Hegwood found himself immersed in the community: "We want the community to know we seriously want to help them and be involved in their endeavours. We don't just worry about basketball because there are a lot of other important issues in the world we can help with." In 1992, Impact magazine (*photos at left and right*) noted that Hegwood was prepping himself for what lay beyond professional basketball. His work in the community was apt practise for his future endeavours. "Once I've finished my career in basketball, I want to get into the field I'm doing now, either coaching or working with children who need help. I think that would be giving of my time wisely. It's very important because you're showing a kid you care."



At age 33, Hegwood ended his basketball career while playing with the 88's and afterwards joined the WBL club as an assistant coach and acted as the team's PR representative. Subsequent coaching stints led him to the Calgary Outlaws (of the Canadian Baseball League) and the Mount Royal College Cougars. It was in Cowtown where he met his wife and felt in his heart that Calgary would be a great city to raise a family.

Hegwood fought for his dream. In turn, it's carried him far away from the hometown he once feared would swallow him alive. He believed he could play professional basketball. Having worked long and hard to reach the level of being an 88's player, he always felt it necessary to give something back. That giving, he has said, is the responsibility of all professional athletes. He wanted to stay in the sport through coaching and believed as a professional athlete that it was paramount for players to be involved with the community as examples of what role models are supposed to be.

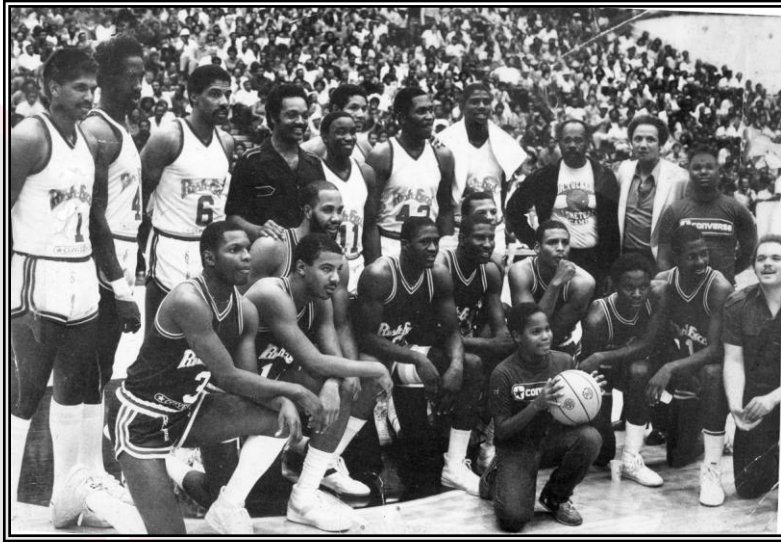
Beginning with 88's Coach Roger Lyons, Hegwood began to put on clinics in Calgary and area schools. In 1992, Impact magazine quoted Hegwood as saying "We try to really go out there and enlighten the children on the correct way to play basketball. It's not a holiday, we make them sweat. We want them to know that if they want to become a good player they've got to work at it, be it basketball or anything in life."

"I'm an athlete. I've got to be a role model. If you're a leader, that's what you have to do, is lead." Hegwood knows his role on a team, any team, and works hard to excel at it.

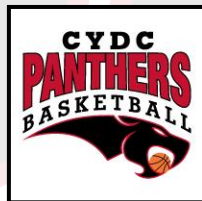
Hegwood has played with and against some of the greatest players to ever grace the hardwood. Players like Julius (Dr. J) Erving, Ervin Magic Johnson, David Robinson, Isaiah Thomas, Dominique Wilkins,



Michael Jordan, John Starks, Mark Aguirre, and Hakeem Olajuwon. The former Indiana basketball high-school All American, NCAA college star, professional ball player, and international basketball star in both the Philippines and Argentina has followed his vision to where he is today: a happily married husband, a proud father of two, an employee at Savanna Energy, founder of Calgary Elite Basketball, and Director of Basketball and Coach for the Calgary Youth Development Centre (CYDC).



*Photo at left: The 1982 Push Excel All-Star game – NBA Veterans vs Rookie Challenge. **Back row (L to R)** Reggie Theus, Dan Roundfield, Julius ‘Dr. J’ Erving, Rev. Jesse Jackson, Isaiah Thomas, Kevin Loder, Mark Aguirre, Ervin ‘Magic’ Johnson, Dr. Charles Tucker, Lenny Wilkens. **Front row (L to R)** John Hegwood, Keith Edmonson, Wallace Bryant (Hegwood’s USF teammate), Dominique Wilkins, Cliff Livingston, Terry Cummings, Clark Kellogg, John ‘Hot Rod’ Williams, Quintin ‘Q’ Dailey (Hegwood’s USF teammate).*



Founded by Hegwood in 2004, CYDC is a not-for-profit organization that was developed to help promote respectful, hard working student athletes on and off the court. CYDC runs an affordable basketball academy, club teams, and house league. As a tribute to his basketball beginnings at Theodore Roosevelt High School in Gary, Indiana, the CYDC logo is a Panther.



Hegwood’s belief of giving something back has not gone unnoticed. Last year he was nominated for and chosen as Calgary’s 2009 Citizen of the Year – a choice made by past award recipients and former aldermen (*photo at left*). Hegwood was nominated by a fellow Calgarian for his work with youth as founder and director of CYDC and presented with the award by the Mayor of Calgary.





Photos at right:
Hegwood's 2009 Calgary Awards "Citizen of the Year" trophy.



Hegwood says that "If you have a belief then you've got to fight for it, because that belief is you." As the crow flies, Gary, Indiana, is 1,425 miles away from Calgary. It could have been a million miles away for the 11-year-old boy who envisioned his future on a black and white TV. However, this boy's belief firmly bonded his dreams to his values of hard work. Follow your dream. Believe in yourself. Get an education. Be a competitor. Know how to win. Be able to handle a great deal of pressure. Be confident.



And by the way, he made good on his promise to his mom who, as predicted, watched her boy play basketball on TV in 1981 in the first nationally televised college game on CBS – USF vs University of Georgia (featuring Dominique Wilkins). USF won the game with a score of 92-84. Hegwood's mom also watched her boy play live in South Bend, Indiana in the USF vs Notre Dame game.

Photo at left: Hegwood playing in the USF vs Notre Dame game. Chicago Bulls player John Paxson, who won numerous NBA championships with Michael Jordan, is at bottom right.

Hegwood is a man of heart who walks the walk and talks the talk. Go ahead and ask him about it. But you won't need to because you will see with your own two eyes that he leads by example.

References

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