



## *Washington Post* on the Prospects Of a Seven-Foot Sabbath-Keeper

by *Michael Sandler*

Sam Randolph, a 6-foot-11, 245-pound Takoma Academy senior playing his first season of high school basketball, has already attracted national attention from Division I colleges. But if recruiters hope to sign the stalwart center, they had better be willing to shuffle their schedules for the next four seasons.

Randolph played little organized ball before transferring this fall to the Takoma Park school from Walla Walla, Wash., in the hope of developing his basketball talent. He is a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, whose followers celebrate their Sabbath from Friday evening to Saturday evening. If Randolph improves into a major college player, which many recruiters believe is possible, colleges interested in him would have to balance his ability with the business of college basketball. That necessitates many games be played on weekends for attendance and television purposes.

"When the scouts come, I like to clear initially that I am a Seventh-day Adventist," said Randolph, who has helped Takoma Academy to its best start (8-3) by averaging 19.5 points, 10 rebounds, 5.1 assists and shooting 80 percent from the free-throw line. "I will not break the Sabbath. I will not be able to play from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday. If they say they cannot work with that, then it is not an

option for me. But if they will work with that, I can go from there."

Odds are some will make an effort. He quickly made an impression this fall playing in pickup games at the University of Maryland with members of the men's basketball team and at the Charlie Weber Invitational, a showcase for top high school players on the East Coast. In his high school debut last month against No. 14 Laurel Baptist, he scored 29 points.

"He already has the skills to contribute to a Division I program," said Largo Coach Lou Wilson. "He catches the ball well, squares up to the basket, has a great touch and can shoot the three-point shot."

More than 40 colleges have expressed interest in Randolph, including Division I powers Duke, Florida, Maryland, and Wake Forest. Though schools can control their regular season schedules, they cannot make adjustments for conference tournaments and the National Collegiate Athletic Association tournament.

The NCAA has already faced similar circumstances. Brigham Young, a Mormon school, requests not to be scheduled on Sundays in the NCAA basketball and baseball tournaments, said Dave Cawood, NCAA assistant executive director. That request has been honored in the past, but "that may be subject to review in the future," he said.

In the 1993 NCAA men's basket-

*One of several nationally recognized Adventist athletes gets diverse advice on Sabbath-keeping, even from fellow members.*

ball tournament, Northeast Louisiana requested that it be scheduled to accommodate the religious beliefs of its star, Ryan Stewart, a Seventh-day Adventist. The school was scheduled to play its first-round game on Thursday, but if it had won, it would have had to play its second-round game on a Saturday.

"If a kid came to me with that kind of problem, I would try to talk to the head of the church and see if they could get a special dispensation for him," said George Washington University Coach Mike Jarvis. "If that did not happen—if he was that good—I would make sure we did not play on Fridays. [However] if I felt over a four-year period, he was not going to play on Fridays, I would have to make a decision on whether or not to recruit him. . . . My first instinct is I would probably pass."

Rick Murray, coach at Columbia Union, a small Seventh-day Adventist college in Takoma Park, said there have been Seventh-day Adventists who have played college basketball but few who kept the Sabbath.

"I do not know of any that have kept the faith and been able to" excel at college basketball, said Murray. "The ones that have become role players. But a lot have

left the church and done extremely well. It is hard for a coach unless you completely restructure your schedule and figure you are not going to make the playoffs."

Randolph has already been lobbied by both sides of the debate. "People are saying that if I do not break the Sabbath right now—and play—then years down the road I will look back on it and feel bitter, and maybe drop out of the church," said Randolph.

Takoma Academy's Todd Sterling, a 6-3 point guard who has received several small college offers, also is a Seventh-day Adventist. He said if faced with Randolph's situation, he would have to weigh all of the factors. "I would make the decision based on what I could get out of the situation and what other people could gain," said Sterling. "If going to that school was based on playing Friday night, I probably would not go there."

One reason Randolph may not waver is that he carries a 4.0 grade-point average and scored 1360 on the Scholastic Assessment Test. He also sings in the choir and plays piano.

"He is looking at so many excellent areas as opposed to a kid who says, 'This is the only thing I have got—this is my ticket out,' said Takoma Academy Coach Brad

Durby. "Unfortunately, what too many kids do not understand is that the only reason [basketball] is all they have is that it is the only thing they have given their heart to."

The pressure on Randolph to choose between his religion and basketball future will likely mount in the coming months. And those associated with his church realize the position he is in.

Dunbar Henry, an ordained minister of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, said Randolph's commitment is exceptional for someone his age. "I wish I could say it is characteristic. There are many that, if they had the same opportunity as Sam, would choose basketball," said Dunbar. "In every situation you have some more settled than others."

Should Randolph play, "All of us would raise our eyebrows and ask why?" Henry added. "The Sabbath is very basic to our belief. People keep it in a different way but playing a sport on the Sabbath—in an organized situation—would not be acceptable."

---

*Michael Sandler wrote this article as a special to the Washington Post. It appeared January 5, 1995, and is reprinted by permission of the Washington Post.*