

Peter Jok took long journey to emerge as Hawkeye leader

By Bruce Strand

Peter Jok wanted to be a soccer player as a child in a prominent family in Khartoum, Sudan, and most likely would have been a very good one.

However, the country's decades-long civil war that has taken his father and grandfather forced the Jok family to flee — and from those tragedies, soccer's loss became the Iowa Hawkeyes' gain.

Jok, who grew up in Des Moines and was a prep All-American as a senior at Valley High, had a breakout junior season with the Hawkeyes, scoring 16.1 points per game. After contemplating entering the draft, he decided to stay at Iowa as the lone returning starter from a 22-11 team.

His senior year, the 6-foot-6 guard came out blazing, averaging 25.7 points and 5.7 rebounds in the first six games, shooting 41 percent on three's and 93 percent at the line, and picking up a Big Ten player of the week award. He's one of 20



Peter Jok

players on the "watch list" for the Jerry West Shooting Guard award.

Jok's emergence as the Hawkeye leader — he's also their lone senior — was featured by Nicole Aurbach in USA Today in October.

Coach Fran McCaffrey told USA Today that Jok was "kind of a goofy freshman ... talented but up-and-down" before buckling down for a good sophomore season, then a super junior year that put him on the NBA radar. "But he never loses sight of his team and his teammates."

Jok, for his part, said he'd never been placed in a leader position before and was learning how, but he and McCaffrey agreed that much insight for him came from the leaders — in much more serious matters — that he grew up around.

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His father, Dat, was a general in the Sudan People's Liberation Army, killed when he was a child. His grandfather, a village chief, was killed when Peter was 17. His mother, Amelia Ring Bol, returns to Sudan ten months a year because she is a member of the parliament.

Amelia fled with her four sons and their grandmother to Uganda, then Kenya, and finally to Des Moines. Peter's younger brother Jo Jo is a defensive lineman at Dowling Catholic and older brother Dau played basketball at Penn.

His role models include not only his parents and grandfather but also Dau, a serious youth who took charge when Dat was killed. Dau formed the Dat Jok Youth Foundation when he was just 18, starting with obtaining a \$10,000 grant to help Sudanese children through education and athletics, sending 1,000 soccer balls and 10 bags of school

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Peter Jok: senior passed on draft to lead young Hawkeye team

supplies. “He is like a father to me,” Peter said.

Peter Jok was a second-team all-Big Ten pick and Hawkeye team MVP as a junior, when his 16.1 ppg included 80 three-pointers and 85.2 percent free throw shooting. Season highlights included delivering 19 points, three steals and four assists in a win over top-ranked Michigan State, 23 points and nine rebounds in a road win over No. 14 Purdue, a game-winning 3-pointer in overtime among 24 points in a win over Florida State, and sinking 27 straight free shots at on point. He also dropped 29 vs. Rutgers, 26 vs. Northwestern, and 28 vs. Penn State.

As a sophomore he started 21 of 34 games and averaged seven points. As a freshman he started to make his mark with seven double-figure games off the bench.

Jok had never played basketball (only soccer) in Africa, but in fourth grade at Greenwood Elementary his friends invited him to join their basketball team. His height and athletic ability were noticed by an AAU coach, Mike Nixon, who was creating a fourth-grade team. Nixon eventually became Peter’s legal guardian.

College offers started pouring in during eighth grade, and in ninth grade at Theodore Roosevelt High he was ranked as one of the 10 best recruits in the country by Scout.com. He averaged 18.6 points as a sophomore and made second-team all-state.

Jok (pronounced “jock”) was talking to Iowa, Marquette, Illinois, Kansas, Louisville, Nebraska, Kansas State, Wisconsin and others at that time. However, he was no longer such a hot prospect when he suffered a knee injury in summer basketball. Still, McCaffrey kept recruiting Jok, figuring the talented youngster had plenty of time. Jok said he didn’t feel 100 percent again until his second year at Iowa.

As a junior in high school, he transferred to Valley in West Des Moines, coached by Jeff Horner, the all-time assists leader for the Hawkeyes. He had a slow start there and averaged 10.2 points as a junior, but exploded as a senior to lead Class 4A in scoring with 23.5 points, making first-team all-state and first-team Parade All-American.

Jok has had some behavioral problems in college that led to two arrests for driving under the influence, both in 2014, the second of which costing him four days in jail. His status on the team was not affected and he’s had no more problems.

Fellow Sudanese refugee Amara Darboh, a star wide receiver for Michigan, is a close friend of Jok’s since fifth grade, and like Peter lost his father in the civil war. Jok attended the game at Kinnick Stadium when the Hawkeyes hosted the No. 3 ranked Wolverines on Nov. 12.

He told the website Land of 10, “I’m going there for Iowa football. But at the same time, he’s like my brother. I hope he does great, and I hope it’s a great game. I told him we were going to upset them, but he just laughed and said, ‘We’ll see about that.’” (Iowa proved their basketball star correct, pulling off the upset, 14-13).

Majoring in Sport and Recreation Management, Jok is on pace to graduate in four years, and will likely land in the NBA or pro ball overseas next year. Hardened by the tragedies and trials of his youth in a war zone, this young man has taken full advantage of the second chance the state of Iowa gave him and his family.

(This article includes information from the Hawkeyes website, the Land of Ten website, and USA Today).

Occupy Our Children

By **Jeff McCarron**
Pacesetter Director

People are good. Through Pacesetter basketball, we meet many people, and I am continually amazed at how good and nice people are...from the players to the coaches to the fans to the hosts to the officials.

Given good health, a relaxed setting, and a healthy activity, people are wonderful – old, young, both genders, all shapes and colors – and not just in this country. People are the same in this way everywhere. This is a great sign for the future of humanity. People ARE good.

So where, why, how and when does it go wrong?

People are also selfish. For survival, for pleasure, for a sense of feeling good about themselves.

It goes wrong when selfish acts are committed at another's expense. Our local town here in Paynesville was shocked to hear that the kidnapper and murderer of Jacob Wetterling went to school in Paynesville and was living here during the abduction and the horrific crimes at the edge of our small town.

A friend of mine here in town tells of the time a little first grade boy was being bullied on the bus and my friend, who was an upper class high school student at the time, offered to let the little guy sit next to him to avoid the bullying - any time he needed to. My friend didn't ride the bus that often. That little guy, who was bullied often and later abused by his mother's boy friend, became the kidnapper and murderer

of an 11-year old boy about 17 years later right here "under our noses". Abuse led to abuse. Two innocents – and many more – ruined in the cycle.

Why is this lesson so hard for us to grasp? Violence leads to violence. As a nation we continue to kill and maim people in foreign lands and wonder why the violence continues.

So much violence and poor behavior is coming at us through "screens": TV, movies, computers, and phones. How much time do children now spend in front of a "screen"? Adults are being distracted with sports, elections, entertainment, and crazy-busy lives while the seeds of more violence are growing "under our noses", whether it is unchecked violence we support abroad or abuse and a deterioration of values we overlook at home.

Relating to basketball, the behavior modeled by players and coaches on TV and in local gyms will be the model set for the younger players watching. Who are your coaches? How do they behave? What standards do they set? Small eyes are observing and much of the behavior will be modeled. When an NBA player knocks down another player and doesn't offer to help him up, a standard is set for the young minds watching. When a coach or parent yells at an official, a behavior is noted and recorded for later usage. When a player or student is bullied by another player or student or teacher or coach, resentment is recorded and will often surface later in depression, violence, or abuse to another victim.

We need to be more vigilant and aware. Are bullying and abuse happening right now in your home, your school or your community? Recognize it, and expose it.

Turn off the screens, block out the negativity, and Occupy Our Children with positive energy and activities. Then seek the models – and BE the models– of the behavior you want to see in them.



Jeff McCarron

Blue-chipper in Register's Iowa Eight

The Des Moines Register's annual pre-season Iowa Eight list of premier basketball stars includes an Iowa City High girl ranked as the No. 16 junior prospect in the nation by USA Today.

Ashley Joens, who recently made a verbal commitment to Iowa State, told the Register that "its been a little crazy, getting a bunch of calls and texts all the time. It's finally settling down. It's nice."



Ashley Joens

Young at No. 21.

The Register's Iowa Eight for girls also includes Berg, 6-0 junior forward, ranked as the No. 5 wing nationally, verbally committed to Missouri; Young, 5-10 sophomore guard; Jinaya Houston, senior 6-1 guard, Davenport North, who's signed with Iowa; Taryn Knuth, 6-4 senior forward, Johnston, who'll play volleyball at Florida State; Maggie McGraw, 5-11 sophomore guard, Indianola; Mackenzie Rogers, 5-10 junior guard, Mediapolis; and Ellie Suffrage, 5-4 senior guard, Pochantas Area, who's chosen Missouri State.

The 5-foot-11 guard averaged 18.7 points as a freshman and 19.3 as a sophomore along with 8.9 rebounds. In her first 46 varsity games, she missed double figures only once. Her varsity debut as a freshman was spectacular, 29 points on 10-for-11 shooting.

She had offers from Iowa State, Nebraska, DePaul, Indiana, Minnesota and others her sophomore year and interest grew even more after a great summer on the Iowa Attack team that has sent over 60 players to D-1.

ESPN's HoopGurlz has three Iowa girls ranked in the top 50 for their class. The others are Indianola junior Grace Berg at No. 35 and Des Moines Valley's Zoe

Boys Iowa Eight

The Register's list of premier boys includes Jal Bijiek, 6-7 senior forward, Des Moines North, described as a lanky highlight-reel dunker and shot-blocker; Xavier Foster, 6-10 freshman center, Oskaloosa, whose parents both played for William Penn; A.J. Green, 6-3 junior guard, Cedar Falls; Sam Ingoli, 6-5 junior forward, Dowling Catholic; Davonte Lane, 6-1 senior guard, Iowa City West, also recruited for football; Connor McCaffrey, 6-6 senior guard, who'll play for his father, Fran, at Iowa; Austin Phyfe, 6-10 senior center, Waverley-Shell Rock, who's set for Northern Iowa; and Joe Wieskmap, 6-6 junior forward, Muscatine, verbally committed to Iowa.

Iowa Girls Athletic Union pre-season top 10 lists

CLASS 5A

1. Davenport North
2. Indianola
3. W.D.M. Valley
4. Iowa City High
5. Cedar Falls
6. Waukee
7. Ankeny Centennial
8. Iowa City West
9. Johnston
10. Linn-Mar

CLASS 4A

1. Pella
2. Marion
3. Waverly-Shell Rock
4. Keokuk
5. C.B. Lewis Central
6. Grinnell
7. Boone
8. Dallas Center-Grimes
9. Carlisle
10. North Scott

CLASS 3A

1. Pocahontas Area
2. Sioux Center
3. Union (LaPorte City)
4. Cherokee
5. Center Point-Urbana
6. Mount Vernon
7. Camanche
8. Clear Lake
9. Crestwood
10. Mid-Prairie

CLASS 2A

1. Iowa City Regina
2. Western Christian
3. Treynor
4. Central Decatur
5. Van Meter
6. Interstate 35
7. Mount Ayr
8. Panorama
9. North Linn
10. IKM-Manning

CLASS 1A

1. Springville
2. Turkey Valley
3. Exira/Elk Horn-Kimballton
4. Kee
5. D.M. Grand View Christian
6. Bellevue Marquette
7. Colo-Nesco
8. Newell-Fonda
9. Glidden-Ralston
10. AGWSR

Pacesetter Youth Basketball Region Playoffs set for Iowa State Championships

Pacesetter Basketball has announced the regional play-off schedule for the 8th Annual Iowa Youth Basketball State Championships.

The North Region Playoff has been set at the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls and Waterloo Columbus High School on Saturday-Sunday, Feb. 25-26. The South Region Playoff will be held on Saturday, Feb. 25 and Saturday, March 4, in Pella.

All Iowa youth basketball school or community teams in grades 4-9 are eligible to play. Teams will play 3-4 games on one day. (See Pacesetter website at www.pacesettersports.net for dates and grades playing.)

The champion and runner-up in each region advance to the Iowa state championships in Ankeny April 1-2. The top two teams from the Pacesetter Iowa state championships advance to play in the Pacesetter Great Four-State Championships in the Twin Cities in an 8-team tournament against the top two teams from Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota.

Iowa won three Pacesetter four-state championships in 2016: Pella 4th grade boys, Xavier Catholic 5th grade girls, and Mason City 6th grade boys.

Complete information and registration are available at www.pacesettersports.net.

*Got a tip for the Iowa Basketball News about a player, team, coach, issue or upcoming event?
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