

BOYS' BASKETBALL

Third Depersia brother hits 1,000

Haddons family lives basketball

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The Haddonfield High School Boys Basketball Booster Club sells \$5 tickets for a halftime, half-court shot at home games.

Anyone who connects receives a \$25 gift card to a local eatery.

There's never been a contestant quite like Mike Depersia.

When his older brothers Nick and Rob played for the Haddons, Mike always got a ticket, and every season he'd cash in at least once.

Then there was the year he couldn't miss.

"He had a streak of seven straight games where he came out, paid the dollar and swished it from half court," his father Robert said.

"We would hear the fans go crazy and look through the window (in the locker room) and Mike's jumping around," Nick recalled. "He said it would be nothing but net every single time."

"The funny thing is the announcer didn't know who it was," Robert added. "He was going, 'Who is this kid? What school you going to?' ... Apparently the booster club lost money (that year)."

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Twins Nick and Rob led the Haddons to two sectional finals during their tenure with the team and each eclipsed 1,000 career points.

Mike joined that club on Saturday, tallying 25 points in a 60-54 triumph over Shipley (Pa.).

"Ever since I was younger, fifth grade to eighth grade, I watched them play," Mike said. "I watched every game of their career. ... Getting in a category with them and doing something special, it means a lot and it feels really good."

Just three other families in New Jersey history have had three brothers reach the 1,000-point club. Kevin, Sean and Shea Harvey accomplished the feat at Audubon; Tony, John and Ralph Sacca did it at Delran; and Ashton, Sterling and Temple Gibbs pulled it off at Seton Hall Prep.

"We put the hours in and work in and just to see this accomplishment, it's like fun to soak in because being an athlete in high school and college, you don't get opportunities to soak in your accomplishments because there's always one thing after another," Nick said. "Seeing him get 1,000 makes you think wow, we must be doing something right."

"It actually almost reassures you and makes you feel that your approach was the right way and you did the right things," said Robert, who trained and coached his sons in travel ball. "I know so many people heavily involved in basketball and their kids want nothing to do with it. I always made sure when we were together, no matter how hard we were working, that it was also their passion and something they wanted. I never wanted them to think when they were training that they were sacrificing. I wanted them to think this is what they wanted to do. That was the most important thing, make it fun."

When Nick and Rob were in high school, all three brothers used wake up at 5 a.m. to lift weights or practice at Virtua Health and Wellness Center in Voorhees.

"It's like a full-time job for them year-round," Haddonfield coach Paul Wiedeman said. "They earned what they got. That's the one thing, you never underestimate how hard these guys work, the heart of a champion."

Mike still follows this routine with AAU teammates now that Nick and Rob are at Rowan.

"He's just so determined and consistently working hard," Rob said. "It's just great."

Rob and Nick both deserve credit for that. The family's backyard basketball court was a war zone during their childhood, and the twins never took it easy on their younger brother.

"Every summer day, imagine us there in the heat

"I watched every game of their career. ... Getting in a category with them and doing something special, it means a lot and it feels really good."

Mike Depersia

Haddonfield basketball player, on joining his older twin brothers with 1,000 career points

getting a tough 1-on-1 game," Rob said. "In third grade he wasn't mature enough or the right size. He'd still go out there and compete, and we made sure to bully him to make sure when he was older he was a beast. There were times we'd make him cry and we'd get yelled at by our dad that he won't want to play anymore."

Mike never had those feelings though.

"I was always really competitive and I hated losing," he said. "... That made me tougher."

Mike's resilience was evident at an early age.

Nick recalled one of Mike's travel games when he was in fourth grade. Nick and Rob were working the scoreboard and Mike's team was down by double digits entering the fourth quarter.

"I just remember Mike coming up to us, not even frustrated at all, and saying I got this," Nick said. "He put up like 20 something in the fourth and every time he'd make a three or a tough shot he'd look at us and smile."

He still does.

The drive to be the best lives in each brother. Ask any of them who the top dog is, the answer is always the same, "me."

"I do have the most wins 1-on-1 when we do go in the backyard," Nick said.

"Even though I'm shorter my basketball IQ is better," responded Rob, who's 5-8 compared to Nick (6-0) and Mike (5-10). "And as good as they think they are, they can't pass, they can't see the floor like I can, and now I can shoot."

Mike's rationale is he's the sum of their parts.

Because Nick and Rob played together for so long, they each developed strengths that benefited the other. Mike had to become the complete package.

"He probably is right," Nick said, but clarified that doesn't make Mike the best.

Their competitiveness never gets in the way of their bond, though.

Nick and Rob text Mike before and after every one of his games. Rob is a Hudl addict, always watching Mike's highlights, trying to give him tips.

It doesn't matter Mike's on pace to break both of their point totals. They all want the other to succeed.

"We have such a good relationship," Rob said. "Even if we get in a fight, the end goal isn't to be better than each other, it's to be the best you can."

"His potential and age, he could be better than us."

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