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Volcanoes' Brown bides time

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**By TIM PYLE
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Mike Brown swatted "The Professor."

And it wasn't just any regular blocked shot.

It was a two-handed, Theo Ratliff-like denial at the rim, the kind of highlight worthy of a spot on the And1 Mix Tape Tour videos that made Grayson Boucher -- a.k.a. "The Professor" -- famous.

At least that's the story according to Brown, a 1997 Prairie graduate who plays for the Vancouver Volcanoes of the International Basketball League.

"I tell all my buddies about it," Brown said of the play in an IBL game against Boucher's Salem Stampede earlier this season. "It was a great block. ... Help defense, I was waiting for him."

There have been a few other IBL highlights for Brown, including a season-high 14 points against the Tacoma Thunder. But largely, the 6-foot-3, 205-pound wing has watched game action from the bench -- not that he has complained.

"They told me at the beginning of the season that they liked my attitude and my game, but I wouldn't get a lot of playing time," Brown said. "They needed a role player, and I've kind of played the role."

As the Volcanoes' season ends this weekend, however, Brown is expected to get plenty of playing time. Vancouver (4-19) meets the Portland Chinooks (8-11) at Clackamas (Ore.) High School at 7:15 tonight, then hosts the Seattle Mountaineers (13-5) in the season finale at 7:15 p.m. Saturday at Clark College.

Terrance Dickens, the Volcanoes' co-owner and coach, said Brown has earned the exposure.

"He's worked real hard," Dickens said. "If I ask him to guard a big man on defense, he'll do it. If I ask him to guard a smaller guy on defense, he'll do it. He also has a real nice outside shot. But he's just got a lot of heart. He really does."

Brown grew accustomed to being a team-first, fill-in-wherever-needed player long ago.

During his Prairie basketball career, he played mostly in the post for coach Eric Hjort, doing the dirty work on teams that featured stars Dan Dickau and Zach Gourde.

Brown said he averaged about 10 points and 10 rebounds a game for the Falcons his senior season, when they lost to Mercer Island in the Class 4A state semifinals.

Brown also ran track and was a wide receiver/defensive back in football at Prairie. In fact, after graduation, he headed to Washington State University with hopes of walking on to the football team.

But by the following school year, Brown was back in Vancouver at Clark College, playing hoops again. He suited up as a wing for the Penguins in 1998-99 and again in 2001-02, helping Clark advance to the Northwest Athletic Association of Community Colleges tournament in the latter season.

Ever since, Brown, 27 and married to Sarah last August, has been working construction in Vancouver -- but never quite hanging up his sneakers for good.

He has bounced around the Portland city-league scene and even played in And1's "open run" at the Rose Garden a couple years ago. That was where Boucher was discovered, launching him on his way to streetball fame.

Brown's IBL career started last year, when he joined the Chinooks for the tail end of the league's debut season.

"You could call it a learning experience, I guess," Brown said of his IBL experience. "This is the highest level I've played at, and it's been fun. I keep playing for the love of the game, and to try to make a little money on the side."

There are also those opportunities for unforgettable memories, like rejections that will reverberate for a lifetime.

"I just saw in Slam magazine they had 'The Professor' as one of their three best streetballers of all time," Brown said. "Well, I blocked his shot."