Holy Cross lands “BIG” transfer

BY JIM MALONEY
CRUSADER SPORTS STAFF

Holy Cross just got a lot bigger with the start of the spring semester, the Holy Cross men’s basketball team added 7’6” Neil Fingleton to the program. Fingleton is no stranger to the area, having attended high school at Holy Name Central Catholic in Worcester (Class of 2000). Fingleton is originally from England where he grew up to play basketball in 1996. While at Holy Name, Fingleton dominated his competition while leading his team to the Central Mass championship in 1998, and a birth in the state finals in both 1998 and 1999.

In addition to his team’s success, Fingleton posted ridiculous numbers, which led to many personal accolades. As a junior, Fingleton averaged 15 points, 14 rebounds, and eight blocks per game. One year later Fingleton averaged 15 points, 14 rebounds, and five blocks.

One of the personal accolades Fingleton received was being named the Massachusetts Player of the Year as a senior. Howev-er, his most prestigious honor was being named to the McDonald’s All-American team in 1999 and playing in the contest on ESPN.

After high school, Fingleton took his game to Chapel Hill, NC to play for one of the most storied programs in college basketball in the University of North Carolina. Fingleton said he was drawn to UNC partly because they’ve had success with sending big guys to the NBA. Coach Bill Guthridge was another one of the factors that attracted Fingleton to UNC, but Guthridge retired prior to Fingleton arriving at school with former Notre Dame coach Matt Doherty taking over.

Fingleton needed back surgery to correct back problems before his freshmen year, and was forced to red-shirt the 2000-2001 season for the Tarheals. This season, Fingleton saw action for Doherty in just one game going scoreless with one rebound.

The commitment was unbelievable (at UNC)” said Fingleton. On Dec. 16, 2001, Fingleton announced his intention to transfer to Holy Cross. With the start of the spring semester, Fingleton plans to “use this year to get away from Worcester and experience somewhere else in America.”

Willard had high praise for Fingleton’s game saying that he has a good touch for a player of his size. In addition, Fingleton plays very well around the basket as one would expect, and has an excellent shot from 15 feet. Because Fingleton displayed these skills in high school, Willard was very optimistic about Fingleton’s potential at the next level. “Guys that tall usually develop later on, so his upside was pretty good coming out of high school.”

Because Fingleton had previously lived in Worcester, Holy Cross was a natural fit for Fingleton when he looked for a place to continue his basketball career. “I feel comfortable here,” said Fingleton. “Holy Cross is a great school and basketball wise it’s a good fit. It’s competitive here and I will be challenged.”

Although NCAA rules will force Fingleton to sit out a full academic year, he is currently practicing with the team and will debut for the Crusaders after his final exam of the Fall 2002 semester if all goes as planned. Fingleton plans to “use this year as a building block. I’ll use the weight room and get bigger. I’m not worried about sitting out.”

A year working with Coach Willard might not be the worst thing for Fingleton either. After transferring from Rutgers in 1998, Josh Sankes was forced to sit out a year. When Willard accepted the head coaching job at Holy Cross in early 1999, he worked with Sankes and turned him from a player who saw very few minutes at Rutgers into a dominant force in the Patriot League. Willard “helped Josh a lot. Hopefully he can make me a better player (too).”

Adding Fingleton to the lineup will likely mean moving now-freshman center Nate Lufkin to power-forward. Lufkin has already demonstrated the rare ability to dribble and shoot from the outside for a big man and moving to a role further from the basket would not be a problem for Lufkin.

By the time next winter rolls around, Holy Cross will have added to their claim of being the biggest team in the Patriot League. Just imagining the frontcourt of Fingleton (7’6”), Lufkin (6’11’), Patrick Whearty (6’9”), Tim Szatko (6’8”), and John Hurley (6’7”) should strike fear in the hearts of Holy Cross’ opponents.

WHERE DO YOU GET OFF?

Don’t miss the bus.
Use your Student Advantage Card.
Call, log-on or walk-in and save
yourself some cash. 800.343.9999

greyhound.com peterpanbus.com