

Looking Back 10 Years Later

by Jimmy Patsos (Loyola MD)

It was Thursday September 6, 2001. The recruiting period was underway and we were busy trying to improve our team. At the time I was an assistant coach under Gary Williams at the University of Maryland and we were trying to get Nik Caner-Medley and Brandon Bowman signed. Gary felt pretty confident that Caner-Medley was going to attend Maryland and we thought that Bowman would follow. That night I got a call from Brandon who told me he was going to play his college basketball at Georgetown. I was really surprised.

The next morning I canceled my travel plans, which had me leaving Tuesday morning out of Logan Airport onboard United Flight 175 to Los Angeles.

To be honest it's not something that I have ever dwelled on. Brandon went to Georgetown and I didn't get on a plane. That's it. As the events of the day unfolded my thoughts were not on what may have been. Instead I was focused on what was happening in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania.

The University of Maryland was probably more directly affected, by the attacks on September 11, than most schools. There was a lot student-athletes who had parents working either in government, in the Washington D.C. area, or Wall Street. Our team, in particular, that year had a number of kids from NY and D.C. There were major concerns on campus that day that the University might be a target. Nobody really had any idea if there were more attacks to come.

It was a difficult day for America. Like millions of others, Gary and I sat and watched the horrific sights and sounds on television. As the Twin Towers collapsed I wondered if my four friends were safe. All four worked for Cantor Fitzgerald, which was based near the top floors in One World Trade Center. Only later did I learn that they had all perished.

I distinctly remember the streets of D.C. looking like something out of an apocalyptic Hollywood film. Unlike the rest of the coaching staff, who all lived closer to campus, I lived in D.C. about a mile away from the White House. It was surreal. The military presence was unlike anything I could have imagined. Wherever I looked I saw soldiers with machine guns walking the streets of our Capitol.

September 11 had a profound effect on Americans everywhere and it was certainly no different at the University of Maryland. In the days and weeks that followed I can remember Gary telling the team, "The season could end at any moment." It's been ten years now, so many have probably forgotten just how tense things were back then. In the weeks and months that followed there was a real concern that more attacks were imminent. Looking back now it must have been quite a lot for the players to deal with, knowing that at any moment it might be over.

That's pretty scary.

Of course it wasn't just our players. It was the post 9-11 world in which players, parents, fans and citizens were dealing with all across the country. Before September 11 the sound of plane flying over would rarely get any attention. After September 11 heads turned skyward as if we had never seen a plane in flight.

We opened the 2001-02 season on November 8 in New York City, against the University of Arizona. That was an emotional trip for our team. I had actually been back to New York just days after the attacks on a recruiting trip. It was tough knowing my good friends were among the casualties. It certainly gave me a new perspective.

"Appreciate the little things." That was a message that Gary conveyed to the staff and the players that season. He really stressed "how lucky we are" to be able to enjoy life. Today that sounds deep. Ten years ago those were the perfect words -- Simple and to the point. It really resonated with all of us that season. And it still does today.

That season ended on April 1, 2002 when we defeated Indiana to win the National Championship. Our 64-52 win capped off a six-month period filled with a range of emotions. I have a lot of fond memories of that season, which ended with celebration but began with such tragedy.

About two years after the 9-11 attacks I ran into Brandon Bowman. We spoke about that day and how things may have been different had he not committed to Georgetown. Both of us now appreciate the little things.