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LARRY HENRY
Sports Columnist

Hoop dreams

UW manager wants to play for Huskies and someday coach Division I basketball

SEATTLE — You don't give up a job that pays for one that doesn't. But that's what Palash Islam wants to do.

He's willing to sacrifice his job as manager of the University of Washington men's basketball team, for which he got his salary doubled this year, so that he can wear a varsity uniform as a non-scholarship player and have a seat at the end of the bench.

His goal is to become a Division I basketball coach and he believes that playing the game, or at least being on the team, will give him leverage when he goes to seek a job.

That's why Islam was back in Hec Edmundson Pavilion one night this week, less than two hours after he completed his duties as manager.

He and 14 other students — plus one self-serving TV sports reporter — had come to put their skills on display in front of the Husky coaching staff during the sixth annual walk-on tryout, open to any student carrying at least 12 hours.

Islam, part Bengali and part Arabic, had come to head coach Bob Bender in August and told him what he wanted to do.

"It says a lot about Palash's character," said assistant coach Jason Hamilton. "He told us he didn't want to be looked at as Palash the manager, but just as another student trying to make the team."

Perhaps it would also open the eyes of the scholarship players to just how lucky they are and to what extremes someone will go just to try to win a uniform and a few minutes of playing time while putting in 20-25 hours a week of practice, weight lifting and film watching.

Andrew Moritz had attained what Islam was seeking. Moritz, a former Franklin High School player, turned out for a walk-on trial in 1996 and made the team. His playing time amounted to 35 minutes the last two years.

"It was a tough way to make it," the 6-foot-2 junior guard said. "Twenty-five guys and they usually pick one and you have one night to show what you can do. What if you have a bad night?"

At least you tried. Like Moritz, Palash wanted to know if he had the skills to wear a uniform of a Pac-10 team. "This is one of my little goals," he said. "I'm always trying to challenge myself."

He was like that in high school. His junior year at Hanford, he turned out for the soccer team midway through the season. The team was 1-5-2 when he joined it. "I said to everybody, 'We're going to make the playoffs,'" he recalled. "We won five of our last eight games and missed the playoffs by a point."

The next year, he was captain, made all-conference and led the team to the playoffs.

Challenge yourself. Think big. Two years ago, he decided to become a coach. He was on the bus coming home from a brokerage firm in downtown Seattle where he was serving an internship. He was reading a book by Dick Vitale, the TV college basketball commentator, when this light went on in his head. Perhaps it was the passion that Vitale brought to his job that inspired Islam to arrive at this momentous decision, though there had been signs earlier in his life that he had one strange characteristic of coaches: He liked to look at game film. Not just any game film. Indiana University game film.

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milestone was more important than Vancouver's 5-0 victory over Florida on Friday night, the Canucks' captain never hesitated.

"Individual success comes from winning as a team. That's the bottom line," he said.

Todd Bertuzzi scored two goals

HENRY

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"In high school I would constantly tape and break down Indiana film," he said.

Why the Hoosiers? He worships coach Bobby Knight.

He doesn't always condone Knight's behavior, but he likes the discipline and the striving for perfection. Bad Bobby demands of his players.

Islam has read all the books on Knight. He knows the Knight connection to Bender — the Husky coach played one year for Indiana before transferring to Duke — and feels somehow all of that knowledge is trickling down to him, Palash Islam.

When Bender got irritated with a Husky practice one day last year, he kicked everyone out of the gym, including managers, and

suspended the workout.

"I thought, 'Wow! This is textbook Bobby Knight,'" Islam said. "I was thrilled."

After deciding he wanted to become a coach, Islam wrote a letter to Bender explaining why he wanted to be a manager for the UW team. It was a well-thought-out letter: "I worked on it for a couple of months," he said.

The essence of it: "This is who I am and this is what I want to do." Islam formulated a plan. Last summer, he attended nine basketball camps, making contacts with coaches. He also sent letters to 40-50 schools inquiring about graduate assistantships. One such job he is hell-bent on landing is at the University of Oregon. "I really want that position," he said. "I want to get rolling."

He thought being a player for the Huskies would give him a better chance to get into coaching than merely being a manager.

Kurrt retired after last season's 601, ninth on the all-time list.

"Only nine players that have ever played the game have scored 600 goals, so it's a huge milestone," Messier said. "I'm not one to dwell on individual statistics, but this is a pretty big one."

Bender can give three examples that fly in the face of that logic: three of his ex-managers are now college assistant coaches, two at the Division I level.

But for his own self-respect, Islam felt that he had to attempt to make the team. "I want to earn my keep," he said.

On the night of the tryout, he stood leaning against the stanchion of a basket, arms folded, eyes taking in the other candidates as they warmed up.

The tryout — lasting only one hour — would consist of drills and a scrimmage. The coaching staff was looking for a big kid, someone who could come in and put a body on 7-foot Todd MacCulloch in practice, and another point guard.

Bender arrived about 15 minutes into the session and immediately asked one of his assistants about a big body wearing a Washington T-shirt. "He can catch and he's strong, but he can't make a

point with a pencil," said the aide.

Islam knew going in he probably wouldn't have the skills of most of the players, but he felt his conditioning would be superior to theirs after a summer of hard workouts. "I'll be disappointed (if I'm not picked)," he said. "But I'd be more disappointed if I didn't at least try."

He puts a lot of credence in a Michael Jordan poster he has above his bed: "I've failed over and over again, but that is why I succeed."

Palash Islam will have to wait a few days to see whether he succeeded or failed the tryout.

Bender said he might take one player, he might take two, then again he might not take any.

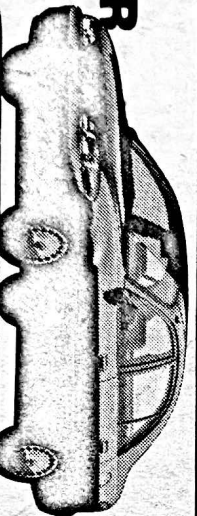
Whatever the outcome, Islam can't lose. "I told coach Bender I'll come back in either a tank top or a T-shirt," he said.

Then he did what he gets paid to do: He wheeled a load of basketballs off the court.

■ **Capitals 1, Sabres 0:** At Buffalo, N.Y., Olaf Kolzig made 30 saves for his second shutout of the season and Jaroslav Svejkovsky scored in the third to lead Washington.

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