

Chargers sign with NCAA Division I Basketball Programs

By Zach Bennett

3 of Columbia State's Men's basketball players have signed their National letters of intent to play for NCAA Division I schools.

Redshirt Freshman Andrew Smith, Freshman A.J Hicks and Sophomore Avery Patterson have chosen to sign with Division I programs after competing this past season with the Columbia State Men's Basketball team in the TCCAA under Head Coach Winston Neal.

With his career coming to a close at Columbia State, 6'10 Center Andrew Smith will continue as a student-athlete with Florida A&M University in Tallahassee, with offers also received from Kentucky-Wesleyan and University of Southern Indiana. Smith averaged 8.1 Points, 7.7 Rebounds, and 2.1 Blocks per game last season for the Chargers.

"When I went down on my visit the 2nd to last weekend of March, I really liked the Campus, the Coaching Staff, and the Facilities Florida A&M has to offer. I like the direction the program is heading and I feel like it's the place I need to be." Smith said.

After a successful freshman season at Columbia State, TCCAA All-Conference First Team honors, and TCCAA Freshman of the Year recognition, Standout Guard A.J Hicks has signed with University of Albany in New York.

The 6-foot guard, one of the TCCAA's top three-point shooters, averaged a team high of 17.8 points per game during the 2015-2016 season.

"I'm very proud of A.J, I couldn't be happier for him and his family. He came to Columbia State with no Division I offers last year, with the dream of playing Division I, and now he is achieving that dream. He now has a chance to move onto a school that competes for championships, and makes frequent NCAA National Tournament appearances. I think he will have a chance to start from Day 1 and perform extremely well." Neal Said

Also signing with a Division I program is Sophomore Guard and Marietta, Georgia Native, Avery Patterson, who came to Columbia State this past season by way of Western Kentucky University.

Patterson has chosen to play for Alcorn State University next season in Lorman, Mississippi, competing in the Southwestern Athletic conference.

At the beginning of the season, it was clear coming into the program, Patterson would assume a leadership role among his teammates having competed at the NCAA Division I level previously.

Patterson averaged 8.6 points per game and started 24 out of the 25 games played this past season for the Chargers.

"Avery is a great competitor and a tremendous pickup for Alcorn State as Coach Huff worked overtime to get this done. Avery is an extremely talented player that can really score and shoot the ball." Neal said.