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February 28, 2006

## He's got the Greene light

UMBC coach gives ex-Whitehall star Jay Greene the OK to be more forceful running the Retrievers' offense.

By Larry O'Rourke  
Of The Morning Call

Whitehall High School graduate Jay Greene is a lot like the kid who was thrown the keys to the car and can get it to and from school, but discovers something new about himself and the wheels every day.

"Sometimes the guys aren't ready for him," University of Maryland-Baltimore County men's basketball coach Randy Monroe said. "It's not a bad pass, but when people aren't used to him, it can be difficult. I preach, 'Keep your hands up. Jay will pass you the ball. If you're not ready, the pass will hit you in the face.'

"But he's making adjustments. And sometimes we have to remind him that, in high school, he had no trouble getting his shot off. Here, he thinks he's open, but guys come out on him, they're bigger, and they can block it. We're trying to get him to adjust by using the pumpfake."

Monroe eventually will get around to reminding Greene and other young players that defense is best played with active feet, not just hands.

But there is little doubt Monroe likes most of what he has seen in Greene's freshman season.

After allowing Greene to watch upperclassmen guide the Retrievers through the early part of the 2005-06 season, Monroe promoted Greene to the starting lineup. The 5-8 Greene has started 17 of the 25 games he has played in, and is averaging 8.1 points and a team-leading 3.7 assists per game as UMBC's primary point guard. The Retrievers completed the regular season with a 9-18 record, and will face Stony Brook on Friday in the America East Conference tournament's opening

round at Binghamton.

"We just felt after about seven or eight games, we needed an adjustment in the lineup," Monroe said. "He was playing well, showed great stamina. Every day in practice he was playing better. Sometimes, as freshmen, you want to take a back seat, not step on toes. That's human nature. It's taken time. But I've told Jay, 'You're like a coach on the floor. If guys aren't where they're supposed to be, you can tell them where to be.' He's adjusting, becoming more vocal. The guys on the team love him."

A lot of people loved Greene's game at Whitehall, too. As a senior last winter, he averaged 17 points, six assists and three steals and was named The Morning Call's Player of the Year, as well as the Lehigh Valley Conference's Most Valuable

Player. As a junior, Greene averaged 16.4 points, 6.5 assists and four rebounds per game while leading Whitehall to a 27-4 record, including the District 11 Class 4A title.

But the first few weeks of a college career can be a great equalizer. Greene discovered that at UMBC, where he chose to take his game after also considering scholarship offers from Wisconsin-Green Bay and Akron.

"Going to college, I'm not sure you can expect to go in there, start right away and make a dramatic impact," Greene said. "You have to pick your spots, see where you can benefit the most. I think I'm figuring that out.

"But it's tough being a freshman point guard. [We]have two senior captains, a junior captain, and you want to listen to them. But they expect me to be a leader, too, so I'm trying to be more vocal."

Greene said he also has had to adjust to life as a college basketball player. With UMBC in the America East with Albany, Binghamton, Boston University, Hartford, Maine, New Hampshire, Stony Brook and Vermont, road trips can end with a late-night bus ride to an airport, a late-night/early morning flight back to Baltimore, and the need to drag a weary body to a morning class.

"You get back to school at 3 in the morning, but that's one of the consequences of playing Division I," Greene said. "And you don't have a choice; if you're on campus, you get to class.

"You have to kind of have more of a one-on-one connection with the professors, let them know you're not going to be there [while on a road trip]. It's not an excuse; you have to catch up. You have to do schoolwork on the road."

And that's in addition to the learning on the court.

"I had to work on my shooting a lot more," Greene said. "In high school, you can get to the lane and finish. Here, I can't because of my height. But I really haven't had any [insurmountable] challenges because of the height. I get away with it because of my quickness. I haven't really played anybody who's quicker, so that's my advantage.

"But the guys are all just taller and quicker [than in high school]. You won't play anyone in Division I who's not as good as you, or better. So you have to find ways to adjust or improve."

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