

# Amityville Record

Amityville, North Amityville, Copiague, East Massapequa, and Long Island, New York

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## **Copiague girls basketball team rebuilds on success**

by Joshua Casper

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The name Walker conjures memories for Copiague High School's girls basketball team. After all, it was just a year ago that All-Long Island Forward Jasmine Walker's 18 points and 16 rebounds led Copiague High School to the Class-A State Title along with fellow All-Long Island honorees Kia Wright and Angie Clark

The women are now Division I College players and the team's future had been the subject of speculation.

Much of that has been put to rest, however, with leasha Walker, Jasmine's sister, and Gabrielle Gibson. The two players have let many an opponent know that their time has arrived, as they led Copiague to a 10-2 regular season record, and a share of the Suffolk County League Title.

"They are the total package; both have it in their blood," said Copiague Head Coach Carole Olsen. "They have to refine their game, but their ability—it's unbelievable and their potential is unlimited."

When seventh graders Gabrielle Gibson and leasha Walker arrived for their first day of practice, becoming the cornerstones of an entire program seemed the furthest thing from their mind. They were barely a year out of elementary school, yet were both blessed with the skills and experience to warrant promotion to the High School Varsity Team, where they would be small fish in a big pond. When some of their teammates were in the seventh grade, they were but seven years old.

"I was nervous to play with people who were older," recalls leasha. "I always played with people my age, so I was intimidated. I was a little anxious to show what I could do and had the pressure from people who didn't think I could live up to what my sister did when she was here."

While Walker learned the nuances of the game from her older sister, now playing at LIU Brooklyn, Gibson has also grown up around the game of basketball watching her father man the sidelines at Westbury High School where he served as Head Coach for eight seasons before stepping down last year.

"I always watched my dad running practice I knew how hard they were I knew how hard varsity was going to be," said Gibson, who credits her dad with much of her knowledge of the game, "I knew the things his players did wrong and what they did right, and tried to pick what I was going to do and not going to do. "

While equipped with the tools for success, the pressure to fit in with new teammates was a difficult adjustment. Both girls spent much of their first season looking over their shoulder, not knowing what to expect. More than points, rebounds and assists, both girls were worried about fitting in and being accepted by their new teammates. The pressure took its toll. Many a times they deferred to their teammates, preferring to blend in as opposed to stand out.

"I was thinking about how everyone would treat me and what I would have to do to get respected," recalls Gibson "I was trying to get everyone involved and I wasn't worried about my own game. I was scared and I didn't want them to get a bad impression of me. I started becoming more passive, and thinking too much. I was giving the ball to everyone else."

In spite of their insecurities and reluctance to display their own offensive skills, both Gibson and Walker managed to provide Copiague with a spark, helping lead them to a surprising playoff berth. As out of place as they felt with their new teammates at times, Gibson and Walker found solace in the fact that each had the other one to turn to. The two had been playing together since grade school, and are also teammates on the AAU Silver Bullets.

"Gabrielle helped me for me for the first few weeks, because we have enormous comfort with one another," explains leasha "We helped each other to get over obstacles. She helps me mentally in practice to get better and better. We stop other teams from adjusting to what one of us is trying to do and putting all of their focus on one of us. She knows what I'm feeling and helps me find a way to deal with it."

As the season progressed, Gibson and Walker both became key contributors, as Copiague earned a playoff berth with a 6-6 record in League III play. Walker averaged 9.3 points, 8.4 rebounds, 4.4 steals and 5.8 assists, while Gibson added 8.6 points, 6.3 assists, 5.4 steals and 5.2 rebounds, tantamount to the many facets of the game, and versatility on the basketball court. Soon they could not help but realize they were each a key component to Copiague's success, something that was equally apparent to their elder teammates.

"Its real important that you earn the respect of your teammates," adds Gibson. "If you are unselfish; if you are playing as a team, you're making them better. If you play as a team they have trust in you. You just have to play your game."

With a year of basketball under their belt, both leasha and Gabrielle began to come out of their shell. Walker, who has the size and the skills of a forward at the point guard position, showed an ability to do damage from all areas of the court, finishing second on the team with 12.9 ppg along with five double-doubles, and a triple double.

leasha even provided some heroics at times, single-handedly pulling out a win against Deer Park. With 35 seconds left, and the Eagles down one, Walker stole the ball at midcourt and drove in for a lay-up, then followed that up with a driving hoop to give Copiague a three point lead. Deer Park got the ball back with 9 seconds left, but Walker made her sixth steal to seal the win.

"I've seen leasha for a long time," says Olsen "She hasn't even showed her A game yet. She is a tremendous passer with great court vision. She has similarities to Kia Wright in that she knows how to help her team get better."

Gabrielle showed flashes of brilliance as well, raising her scoring average almost seven points, as she lead the team with 15.5 ppg. Gibson, who was the game's leading scorer on six occasions, also eclipsed the 20-point mark five times in 2005.

"leasha and Gabrielle continue to make the commitment, even though they are very young," continued Olsen. "I am happy with where they are now, and with their performance this year. They have the heart to go far; they are going to go places."

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