

Port's Burbach decides to play ball at Rice

Written by STEVE OSTERMANN
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Senior guard accepts walk-on role to join Div. I college program in Houston

Port Washington High School's best all-around basketball player will take his talents to Texas this fall.

Joey Burbach, a senior guard who earned All-North Shore Conference second-team honors, has accepted an offer to become a preferred walk-on with the men's basketball team at Rice University in Houston.



Burbach, who led the Pirates with per-game averages of 17.8 points and 7.5 rebounds, said he turned down scholarship offers from NCAA Division II schools for a chance to play Division I basketball.

"I felt Rice would give me the best opportunity academically and athletically," he said. "Playing Division I basketball has always been a goal of mine."

At 6-foot-5, Burbach combined his size with quickness and ball-handling ability to become one of the area's top offensive players. A three-year varsity player, he capped his senior season by becoming one of only five Port players to reach the 1,000-point career mark.

"Joe's not afraid of anything out on the floor," Port coach Brian Hebein said.

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"He's got the 'it' factor. He attacks the hoop. He's tall and long and can shoot it and get to the rim.

"You can't teach that strength and athleticism. Joe has all the tools to play at the next level."

In addition to his play with the Pirates, Burbach caught the eyes of college scouts as a member of the Wisconsin Blizzard, an AAU team.

He said he received basketball scholarship offers from two Division II programs, Saint Leo University in Florida and Minnesota State University, as well as interest from other teams, including Loyola University (Chicago).

Although Rice is coming off a 5-26 season, including a 1-15 record in Conference USA, Burbach said he welcomes the chance to be part of a rebuilding effort under head coach Ben Braun.

"I like that idea. It could mean more playing time," he said. "Hopefully I can contribute and earn a scholarship after my first year."

A National Honor Society member, Burbach plans to study business in college.

He is the son of Ted and Linda Burbach of Port Washington.