
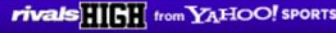


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Eil-Sean Smith
 NorCalPreps.com Basketball Analyst

On many occasions prep players will not entertain attending a JUCO. Most, if not all, want the opportunity to start their post-prep careers at a four-year college or university, but as is commonly seen around the country, many just are not ready, academically or skill-wise, or maybe it just might be a good idea to work on facets of their game that will make them a more complete player upon entry to the four-year set.

Would-be collegiate stars should pay close attention to exhibit A, Chereese Thomas. The former Dublin star and a NCP Top 40 member in the class of 2010, recently gave a verbal commitment to play ball at San Jose State University.

The 5-foot-8 Thomas garnered interest from schools like UC-Davis coming out of Dublin, but the Communications major, sporting a 3.0 G.P.A., decided that a two-year stint at the junior college level, in this case at Ohlone in Fremont, would be a good fit and afford her the chance to hone her skill set.

On coach Julia Allender's squad, Chereese has guided a 14-5 squad (that opened the season knocking off top-ranked Fresno City College) by assembling a season typical of a player with her many talents: 14.5 points, 4.6 assists, eight rebounds, three steals, 42% shooting from the field (including 40% beyond the arc), 73% shooting from the charity stripe, and just three turnovers a game while clocking 38 minutes per contest. Not bad for a player who, as Allender put it, "had never played point and didn't want to shoot."

According to Allender, Chereese, and her dad Michael Thomas, himself a former San Jose State baseball player who also starred in football and baseball at Kennedy in Richmond, the younger Thomas was getting heavy interest from Kearney-Nebraska and Cal-State Monterey Bay, but San Jose was the best fit. "They want me to play the point," says Chereese.

A great defender, Thomas admits that her ball-handling can use some improvement, and the same can be said for her after-dribble moves, but she has the pull-up, mid-range jumper, an all-important piece to have for any point guard, down pat. "It's my go-to move," she said.

Chereese was known at Dublin as the kid with the non-stop motor, great character, and a strong work ethic. Nothing has changed as evidenced by her numbers and the minutes she spends on the floor, and it doesn't surprise her coach.

"At this level (JUCO) it is about dedication. We are at the development level," said Allender. "I was a JUCO kid and I understand what they're going through, but with Chereese, it's been fun. She never played point and to flourish at it, directing traffic, running a Princeton offense? I wish I had 15 players like her every season."



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