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Getting with the program

KU recruits Xavier and C.J. Henry have been trained by their dad to be pro athletes.

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First, the fairy tale:

Carl Henry and Barbara Adkins played basketball at Kansas during the early 1980s. They got to know each other better through nighttime walks from Allen Fieldhouse to their dorm, and they fell in love at KU, their hoop dreams fueling a future together. They were married in crimson-and-blue matrimony and headed for Europe, where Carl would play basketball.

They had a boy named C.J., and, four years later, another boy named Xavier. In Belgium, they pronounced the name Zah-vee-ay, and the Henrys kind of liked it. Carl would sit his sons on his lap and tell them about this special place called Kansas. Hopefully, he'd say with pride, they would play there someday just like their mom and dad.

C.J. and Xavier would become high school basketball stars, coveted by every school in the country. Of course, they chose to play at Kansas.

III

Now, the reality:

OKLAHOMA CITY | Carl Henry yawns. He leans forward on a weight bench in a high school football training facility that feels like a humidifier, trying to keep his eyes open. His sons are lifting weights and jumping over stacked padded blocks.

C.J. and Xavier are not kids anymore, but Carl still chooses to watch their daily workouts with personal trainer Mark Heusman.

"I just try to make sure they're working hard," Carl says.

Carl perks up when Heusman challenges 18-year-old Xavier, all 6 feet, 6 inches of him, to jump over five blocks from a stationary position. The blocks reach above Xavier's midsection, and, having never attempted this drill before, he hesitates.

"Come on, Xavier!" Heusman says. "It's a mind thing! Come on, Xav!"

Finally, after several hiccups, Xavier clears the mental and physical barrier. Feeling good about himself, he mouths off to C.J., who isn't allowed to attempt the jumps because of his ongoing recovery from an injury to his left foot.

"I'll bet you 100 you can't," Xavier says.

"End of the summer," the 23-year-old C.J. retorts.

The Henrys like to work. They take no shortcuts. The only problem is that it's late June, and they're working out in Oklahoma City instead of Lawrence with their teammates. The Henrys' decision not to attend summer school is just the latest twist in their courtship with Kansas that, somewhere between the boys' signings with Memphis and their April flirtation with Kentucky, has lost some of its romance.

Still, even after those bumps, KU coach Bill Self and the Henry boys clung to the storyline: With their pledge to the Jayhawks, they would become the "first family of Kansas basketball."

Yet, while freshmen Thomas Robinson and Elijah Johnson are already on campus attending classes like most others around the country, the Henrys remain here. Carl says he encouraged Xavier to attend summer school.

"He doesn't wanna go," Carl says. "I said, 'Well, you call Coach Self and tell him you don't want to come.' "

Xavier says it's nothing personal. He had to get his braces off and recently had root canals done on his front two teeth. Carl says it's more that Xavier is not interested in attending class.

"If he didn't have to go to college, he wouldn't do it," Carl says.

A month after signing with the Jayhawks, Carl says, the family looked into Xavier playing in Europe for a year.

"You don't have to take any classes," Xavier says.

Carl found out that Xavier could sign a contract of \$1 million for one season, but there was a snag: They would have to sign without knowing where Xavier would play. Carl was not willing to risk Xavier playing somewhere dangerous.

"I'm the one going over there with him," Carl says. "I'm not going over there where they're fighting."

Plus, Carl felt Xavier should take advantage of the exposure he'd receive playing on a national stage at Kansas. That was even more of a factor for C.J., who hasn't played in an organized basketball game in four years while pursuing a professional baseball career in the Yankees' organization and sitting out a year as a walk-on at Memphis.

Carl says both of his sons hope to be one-and-done at KU.

"I don't like stepping on people's toes," Carl says, "but I just know what I know. I watch

them play, all the Kansas kids. I like all these kids, (Sherron) Collins, (Tyshawn Taylor), they're good kids, man. But they're not better than C.J."

Biased father? Possibly. But Carl Henry is making himself clear: His boys have worked for their opportunity, and they're going to get it.

"Everybody's gotta be on board," Carl says. "The coach has got to be on board."

More and more, college basketball coaches are jumping on rides like this one. At elite programs such as Kansas, they don't really have a choice. Neither side is right or wrong. It's just reality, and it's not very romantic.

"I would hope they'd want to be here," Self says. "I'd rather them be here."

III

Carl Henry is shoveling down Chinese food for lunch. As much as he likes to talk, it's a miracle any food gets eaten.

"For me, they could go where they wanted to go," Carl explains between bites. "What I did, I prepared both of them where they could go play anywhere in the country. You can go to Duke, you can go to Carolina, and they're going to want you. When it came down to the final year, guess what? All these teams wanted you."

Carl's iPhone rings, interrupting his flow. It's Bill Self. Carl looks at the phone and considers whether or not to answer. He hits ignore.

Unlike his boys, Carl never received phone calls from big-time Division I coaches when he was in high school in Hollis, Okla. He went to Oklahoma City University, which was just fine by him. Raised by his mother and aunt, he barely knew the game because he didn't have a father or a coach in his life who could teach him more than the basics.

In 1982, after Carl spent two years at OCU, the school folded its Division I program and fired the coach. Carl knew he had to transfer, and he also knew that a girl he fancied, Barbara Adkins, was playing at KU. Kansas coach Ted Owens had never seen Carl play, but Carl drove up to Lawrence and joined in a summer pickup game among players.

Owens saw enough to offer Carl, a 6-foot-6 guard, a scholarship.

Playing one season for Owens and another for first-year coach Larry Brown, Carl led the Jayhawks in scoring for two straight years. Still, he was not coveted by NBA scouts.

"Everything didn't just come easy for him," says Barbara Henry, who has been divorced from Carl for five years. "He always did the extra to try and get better."

Carl was taken in the fourth round of the 1984 NBA draft by the Kansas City Kings and played a part of one season for the franchise once it moved to Sacramento. He landed in

an under-6-foot-5 league despite being 6 feet 6 and eventually made the move to Europe.

Carl lasted until 1993, bouncing around between Spain, Italy and Belgium. His young family was with him, but he didn't bring many good basketball memories home.

"It was a job," Carl says.

Since then, Carl has often wondered how good he could have been if he had started getting serious about basketball earlier in life. Maybe then he'd have gotten those calls from the big-time coaches, guys with reputations like Self's.

A minute has passed since Self's call, and Carl picks up his phone.

"You know what?" Carl says. "I better call that guy back."

Carl likes Self. Sure, his family's odyssey to Kansas hasn't been smooth, but he's not trying to ruffle the feathers of the head Jayhawk.

"Hey, Coach," Carl says.

It appears Self is just checking in.

"We've been doing two-a-days," Carl reports. "Had them on the court doing a lot of shooting drills."

Carl is trying to put Self at ease. He hangs up the phone. His stomach is growling. It's time for another trip through the buffet line.

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Just like their future teammates at Kansas, the Henry boys are playing video games to relax. Unlike their teammates, they are gaming in a fully-furnished, two-story condo that some men would have to work their entire lives to buy.

C.J., who labored in the minors for three years after deciding to play pro baseball instead of basketball at KU in 2005, bought the place with his own money. There's a Jacuzzi in the bathroom, sophisticated art on the walls and a massive flat-screen TV mounted high in the living room. C.J. drives a Range Rover with "HENRY" etched into the rear door. Xavier, while not yet a professional, drives a Hummer.

"For Xavier, he needs the leg room," Carl says.

Truly, this is all the Henry boys know. Carl raised his sons to be professional athletes, and he's half of the way there. After his Europe experience, he wasn't going to leave anything to chance.

"I kind of raised them ... you gotta do this, this, this and this," Carl says. "You can't be

waiting around to do it. You gotta do it now."

From the time they were seventh-graders, Carl had them doing extra work outside of practice.

"Jump rope a thousand in the morning at like 6 o'clock, push-ups in between your sets of jump rope," C.J. recalls. "Or he'd make you do it at night. You could already be asleep, and he'd say, 'You get that in today? No? It's time.' "

With C.J. and Xavier, work became second nature, merging with good genes. And before long, Carl's plan started to fall into place. C.J., a 6-foot-3 point guard, had committed to Self and Kansas. One thing Carl didn't expect was the Yankees to make C.J. their first-round pick in the 2005 draft. C.J. signed for a \$1.575 million bonus and left basketball behind.

Through it all, Carl and Barbara spent their summers switching off between touring small-time ballparks with C.J. and attending AAU basketball events with Xavier.

"There's a lot of sacrifices," Barbara says.

C.J. injured his neck in spring training in 2008 and decided to return to basketball a year before Xavier would be a freshman. Xavier favored Memphis and Kansas, so C.J. would choose one of the two. By August, he had picked the Tigers because of coach John Calipari's wide-open style and dribble-drive offense. The family wasn't insisting that Xavier choose the same school as C.J., but the brothers had always wanted to play together. Accordingly, Xavier also signed with Memphis.

When Calipari left Memphis for Kentucky in April, the Henrys, particularly Xavier and Barbara, felt betrayed. After a three-week period that left the family and the fan bases at KU, Memphis and Kentucky exhausted, the Henrys agreed on Kansas. The boys were interested in UK, but Carl says that Barbara didn't want to move to Kentucky.

"Everybody was ready to get it over with," Barbara says. "I said, 'What's the worst that can happen? You can go to KU. You love KU.' "

Lounging on a white leather sofa in C.J.'s apartment, the Henry boys' attire hints at quite a story: C.J. wears a Memphis shirt, Xavier a KU practice jersey.

"I'm ready to go up there and get everything started," Xavier says.

Kansas fans can relax: The Henrys' allegiance to Calipari and the thoughts of Europe are behind them now. They will show up in August, and they will do the work on the court and in the classroom. Still, the NBA remains in the forefront. If it weren't for the league's age limit of 19, Xavier would almost certainly have been picked in the first round of Thursday night's draft.

"If you're ready," Xavier says, "you should be able to go. But most kids that came out of

high school, they weren't ready when they were supposed to be. They were just jumping to make money."

Xavier would have jumped because he believed he was ready. As a high school junior, he was told by numerous sources that he had an NBA-ready body. His time at Kansas will be dedicated to fulfilling that destiny, the one laid out by his father.

"He's proud of what we've done so far," C.J. says. "But he wants us to keep striving toward the next step or next goal. We can always do more."

III

So no, this couldn't have been what Bill Self imagined when he started recruiting the Henry boys many years ago. But hey, Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan always bumble it up a few times before they connect in those romantic comedies, right?

There is little doubt -- thanks in large part to the Henrys -- that KU will begin the season ranked No. 1. And who knows? Maybe everyone will get what they want -- for Self, a second national championship, and for the Henrys, an early exit to NBA riches.

Self found himself in a similar arrangement with former Kansas guard Brandon Rush, who often talked about his disdain for classes and nearly entered the NBA draft out of high school. Of course, Rush had the choice, and Xavier Henry didn't. Rush ended up staying at Kansas for three years, helping Self win a national title and propelling himself into the draft lottery.

The moral of the story? The Henrys can realize their goals more easily by embracing Self's as their own.

It's that realization that sends C.J. and Xavier to Heusman each morning, out into the searing Oklahoma sun for what has to feel like punishment to young Xavier. You want to be a professional? Well, how do you like throwing a 10-pound ball behind your head and chasing it down a football field, hoisting it again and again in 100-degree heat?

C.J., who's already been a pro, shaving every day to follow the Yankee way, laughs at his little brother.

"This is so hard," C.J. says. "So hard."

Xavier crosses the goal line and immediately falls to the ground, his bare back rubbing against the parched, yellowing grass. Carl Henry, taking it all in, walks across the field carrying an umbrella. He holds it over Xavier and C.J. to block the harsh rays.

"You gotta work for what you want," Carl says.

For the moment, the Henrys want Kansas.