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# Dime

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## BRANDON ROY

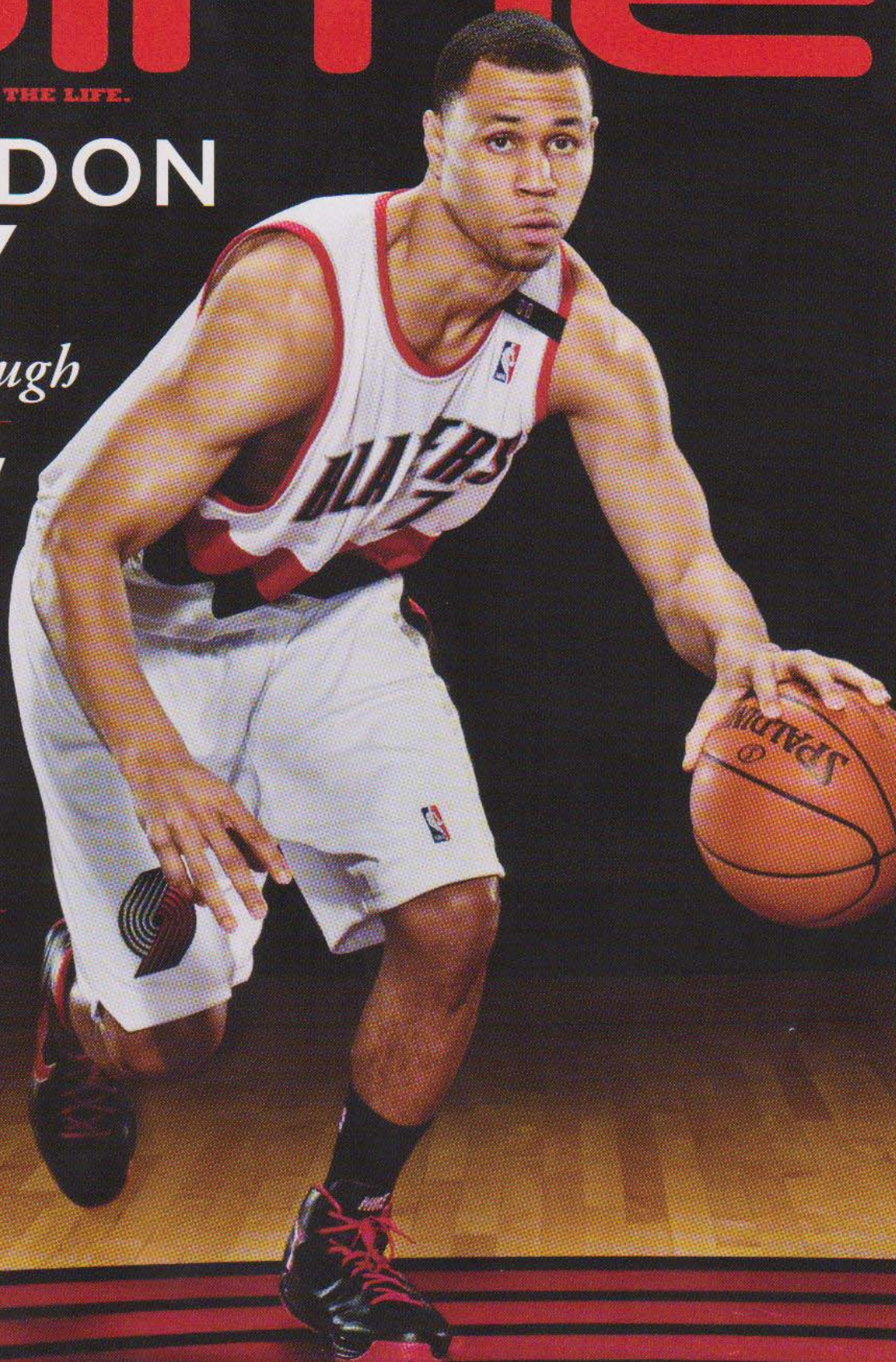
*Breaks Through*

**Stephen Curry**

*NBA star or bust?*

*High School Hoops'*  
**Most-Feared Scorer**

*&*  
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# John Legend

There is a tiny town in Tennessee kept awake by the squeak of sneakers and the swoosh of a net at all hours of the day and night. This is where John Jenkins has turned himself into one of the most feared offensive weapons in all of high school basketball.

Words: Andrew Katz. Photos: Rick Murray. Photo illustration: thundercut.

**O**n Super Bowl Sunday, the Station Camp High School (Gallatin, Tenn.) Bison took part in America's great tradition as a unit, huddling together around a couple of pizzas and a beautiful projection screen inside a teammate's home. The team was still coming down off the high of a 66-51 romp against rival White House High less than 48 hours earlier, in which SC's 6-4 shooting guard **John Jenkins** single-handedly outscored White House 52-51. When he slipped into the room shortly after kickoff, Jenkins smiled quietly as his teammates recapped the win; he preferred to hang back with Coach Seth Massey's three-year old son while digging into the pizza. "That's my man right there," says Jenkins about Massey's boy Matthew. "That guy shoots almost as much as I do."

So when Larry Fitzgerald burned the Steelers' secondary for a 64-yard score in the fourth quarter, one of the boys on the couch turned around to share the moment with Jenkins, but the back wall was empty.

"In the fourth quarter, it was killing me!" says John. "I knew someone was out there working on their game right then. So I was like, 'I gotta go.' I left in the fourth quarter of the Super Bowl, got some shots up. Man, I felt a lot better after that."

When Jenkins pulls his best superhero impression and vanishes from a crowded room into thin air, at least his friends and family know where he's going to appear: the gym. In the world of high school basketball, it is universally true that there is someone out there working harder than you, your team's best player, and everyone that you know.

### **John Jenkins is that someone.**

"I know our kids talk about it - but I don't know this to be a fact," whispers Gallatin High coach Bobby Luna in hushed tones as if he's harboring a scandalous secret. "That John has a key to their gym. I've heard that he'll be there hours when nobody else is there, a lot of times late into the evening and in the morning before other kids think about getting up for school."

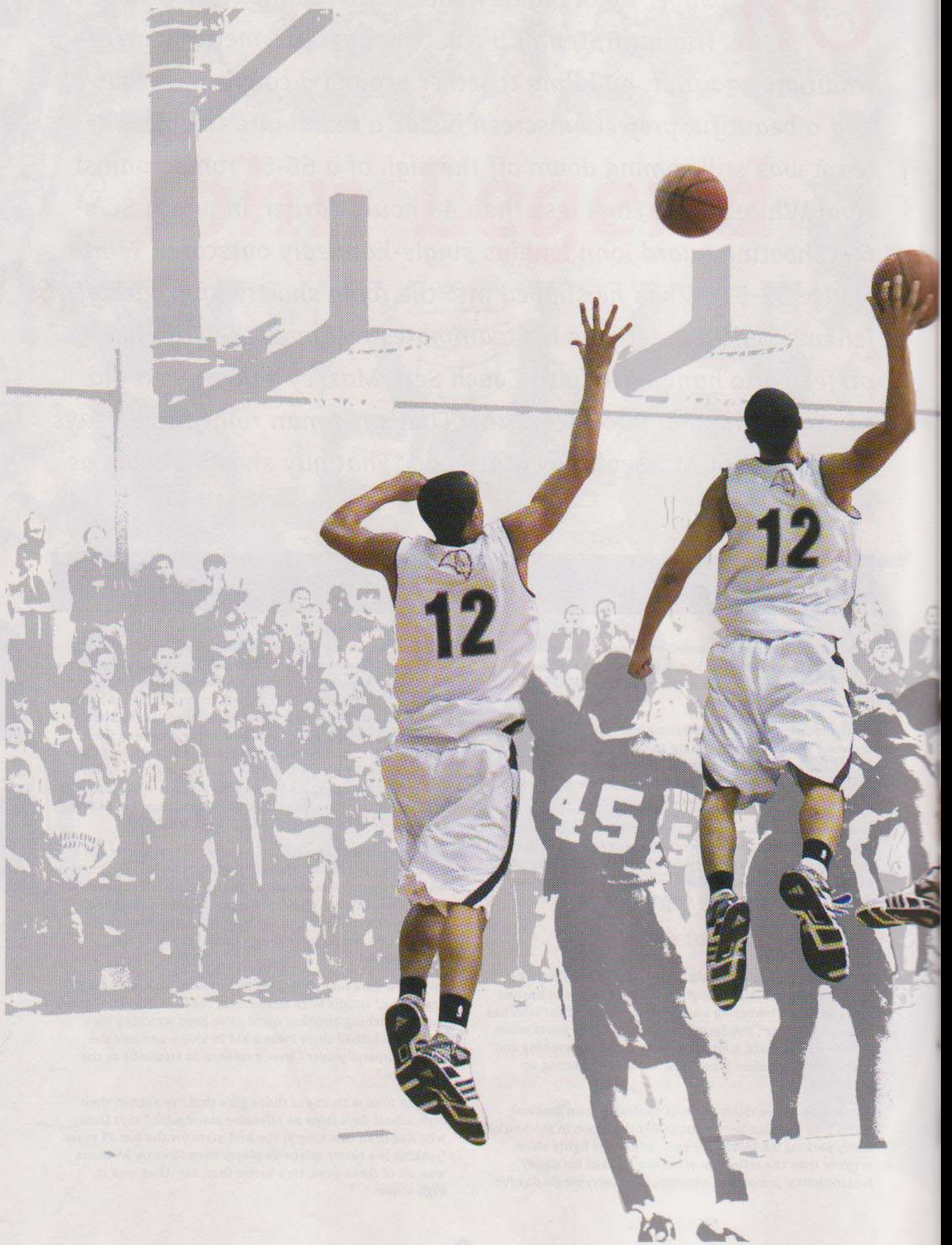
About twenty-five miles north of Nashville, John Jenkins' white 1986 Cadillac Seville sits under the moon in the Station Camp parking lot. Inside the gym, where the lights shine brighter than the reflection off of the hood of his Caddy, Jenkins hoists jumpers at a torrent clip. Every single day for

the last two, maybe three years, Jenkins has built his game right here, blossoming into an unconscious shooter who plays like Gilbert Arenas. As a senior, Jenkins is making a mockery of his award-winning junior season, in which he took home the Class AA Tennessee Mr. Basketball Award as the state's leading scorer (30.9 ppg). Now, he is really drowning the competition in points. After a 60-point barrage against Class AAA rival Gallatin, in which John eclipsed the 3,000-point plateau for his career, he boosted his average to 42.6 ppg - a drop under the state single-season scoring record of 44.2 ppg set by Ridgeway's Ronnie Schmitz in the late '80s.

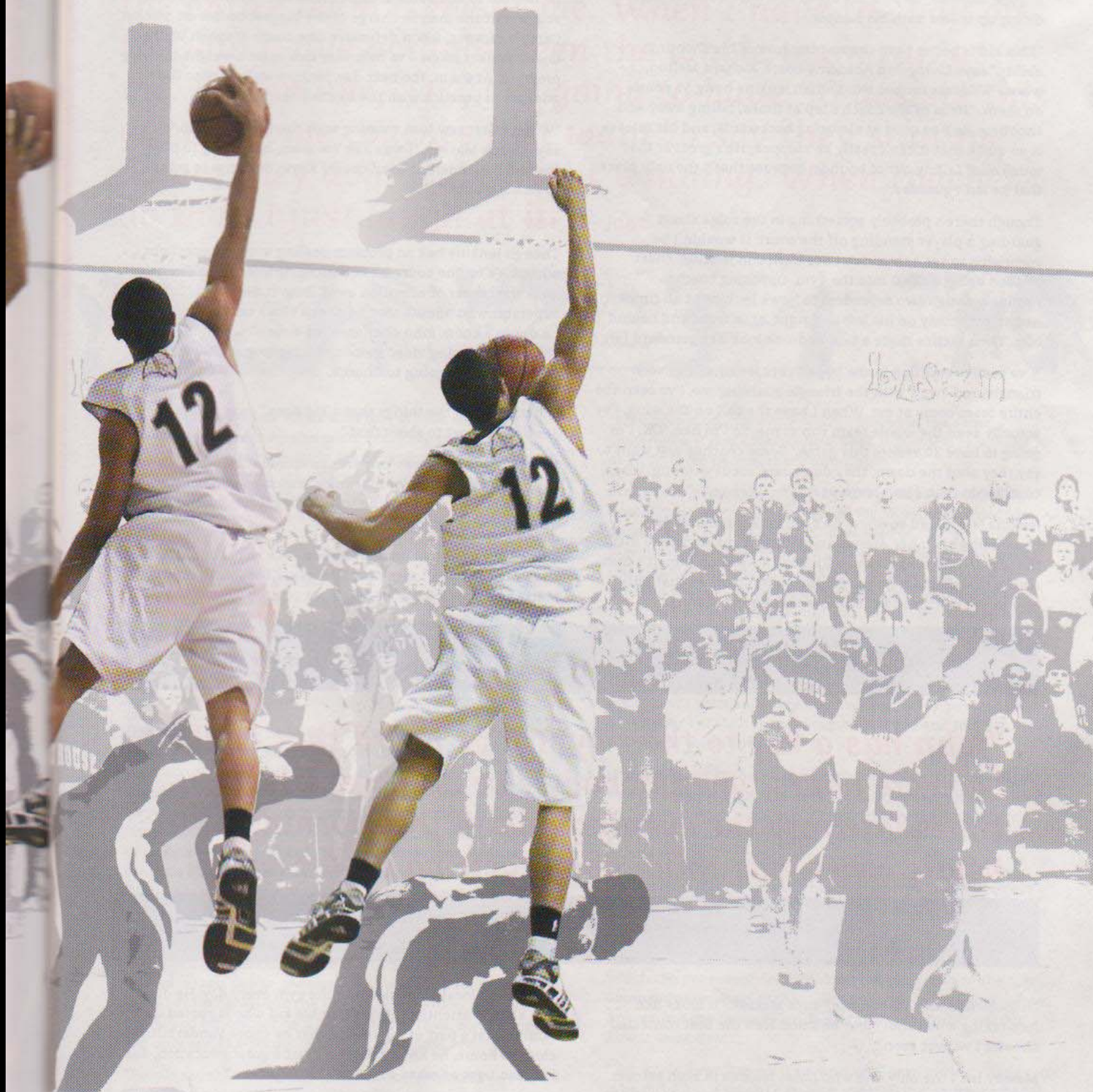
"There's no doubt that he's in the class of Ron Mercer, Tony Delk, Penny Hardaway, Brandan Wright," says Massey, knowing well that Mercer was ranked as the No. 1 overall prospect in the Class of 1995, ahead of Kevin Garnett and Stephon Marbury. "I'm not going to say that he's better than those guys. But he can do more things than them in a high school game."

"Well, we were hoping to keep him around 30, but he got 55 against us," laughs Mike McPherson, coach of David Lipscomb High. "Watching him that night - I've been watching high school basketball since I was a kid in 1973 - and he's the best all-around player I have ever seen in Nashville or the mid-state."

"I'll put John with any of those guys that I've seen in their high school days from an offensive standpoint," says Luna, who has been coaching in the mid-state for the last 19 years. "Jenkins is a better offensive player than Shawne Williams was, all of those guys. He's better than Ray Allen was in high school."



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While Jenkins' stats are astounding – he has tallied eleven games of at least 40 points and four of 50-plus – he drives local coaches, photographers, writers, and teachers crazy because he completely dominates games with his skill. We've been conditioned to scour the high school hoops landscape for supernatural ability – the KGs, Amar'es, LeBrons, and Lance Stephensons – who combine unbelievable athleticism with basketball aptitude. In that sense, Jenkins is the anomaly. No doubt he is physically gifted at 6-4, 190 lbs. with notable hops. But he doesn't really outmuscle, out-jump, or outrun anyone. Instead, he puts his bread and butter skill to use, dicing up teams with his jumper.

"This kid is better than the rest because of his shooting ability," says Livingston Academy coach Richard Melton, whose Wildcats ranked No. 3 when Jenkins hung 51 points on them. "He is in the coach's lap at times, falling away and shooting. He's so good at elevating backwards, and his release is so quick that it can't really be stopped. He's great at that tough shot falling out of bounds, because that's the only place that he isn't guarded."

Though there's probably something in the rules about guarding a player standing off the court, it wouldn't be surprising to see someone's nose buried in Jenkins' chest as soon as he walked into the gym. Opposing coaches routinely assign two defenders to hawk Jenkins at all times – simultaneously on his left and right, or in front and behind him. Their tactics make a box-and-one look like standard fare.

"I've seen everything in the book," says Jenkins. "I've seen triangle-and-two's with the triangle guarding me, I've seen the entire team come at me. When I have the ball on the wing, I've actually seen the whole team run at me. So I'm like, 'OK, I'm going to have 30 assists this game.' Some coaches just want to say they shut me down; they don't care about winning. When coaches do that, I just laugh at it."

Jenkins is doubled so often, he's grown accustomed to channeling his inner Arenas and letting it rip anywhere inside that 21-27-foot range, even with guys draped on him. It's that ability to sink shots no matter the circumstances that puts him in the pantheon of Tennessee's greatest scorers.

workouts can reach mythic heights. But in this case, the myth is also close to reality.

When he feels as though he needs to get in some extra free throw shooting, Jenkins will shoot 500 from the stripe. When he wants to work on three's, he'll take 100 triples from ten different spots on the floor. Most days he's already sweating in the gym by 6 a.m., and he routinely doesn't leave until 10 at night.

At the beginning of this school year, John felt as though he needed to add some muscle to his slender frame. So he sought out the man in charge of the biggest bodies on Station Camp's campus, Bison defensive line coach Stephen Walker. Coach Walker offered to help him kick-start a weight-training program. At 6 a.m. the next day, Jenkins walked onto the gridiron to practice with the football team.

"When I first saw him running with the football team," says Coach Massey, "I was like 'Aw man, he's going to play football?! [Vanderbilt head coach] Kevin Stallings is going to kick my butt!'"

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Though Jenkins has no problem dealing with the spotlight when he's on the court, he is noticeably uncomfortable when he is the center of attention away from it. He is a reluctant superstar who admits that he doesn't love talking to people he doesn't know. John cherishes his time in which he can "just be a kid" – playing video games, talking to girls, hanging out with his family, going to Church.

"I like to do all the things that a kid does," says Jenkins, "as long as I get to shoot first."

So when local TV news cameras swarmed the Station Camp gym at the beginning of his junior season in anticipation of his college commitment, he wanted to get the process over and done with as soon as possible.

"We're not used to a lot of attention – we're north of Nashville in a country town," says Coach Massey. "But John's scoring started to draw a lot of it. Before he committed to Vanderbilt,

***"John has a key to their gym. I've heard that he'll be there hours when nobody else is there, a lot of times late into the evening and in the morning before other kids think about getting up for school."***

"It looks like he's off-balance," says Massey. "It looks like he's taking a bad shot – but he's not. He's the best contested shooter I've ever seen."

Massey isn't the only one who holds Jenkins in high esteem. Jenkins is respected – and feared – by peers across the state. Rumors of his legendary work ethic and otherworldly jump shot fill the halls of rival high schools. By the time these tales reach the end of the "telephone" chain, rumors of John's

there were local TV cameras in the gym every day. He didn't like all that attention. He's a humble kid who is rooted in family. That's part of the reason that he chose Vanderbilt. It's close to home, he knows that he'll get a great education, and it doesn't get as crazy as a lot of other places."

Almost a year and a half after signing a letter of intent, it's not uncommon for high school basketball players go back on their original decisions. In fact, sometimes it's almost a surprise