

#CanBall Weekly: Lakers' Robert Sacre doesn't forget his North Vancouver roots

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By Israel Fehr

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TORONTO – Known for his antics on the bench and locker room humour, it's abundantly clear Lakers centre and Canadian men's national team veteran Robert Sacre is enjoying life in the NBA for all that it's worth.

But even as he's climbed to the top of professional basketball, Sacre certainly hasn't forgotten his roots. While more than 3/4 of the Canadians playing in the NBA have ties to Greater Toronto, a sound argument can be made that the best high-school basketball in Canada was being played in North Vancouver gyms when Sacre was suiting up for the Handsworth Royals from 2003-07.

When Sacre's Royals took on their cross-town rival, the Argyle Pipers, the bleachers were packed with engaged fans ready to take in the action. During those days the stakes were high. The winner of the Handsworth-Argyle showdowns could often claim to be the best team in British Columbia. They would both go on to prove it, too. The Pipers won the Triple-A provincial championship in 2004 and Sacre's Royals triumphed in 2006.

"Those games were like the NBA championship for us. It was crazy. I had so much fun playing against Argyle and having that rivalry on the North Shore," Sacre told Yahoo Canada Sports in an interview in the visitor's locker room at the Air Canada Centre in Toronto.

Sacre was undoubtedly the star attraction, but it was far from a one-man show. Many of Sacre's Handsworth teammates continued their basketball careers after high school. Most notably, Tyler Kepkay played two years of junior college before closing out his post-secondary career in Division I with Utah and was called up multiple times to

the Canadian men's national team. Argyle didn't have anyone with a profile like Sacre, but still sent a number of players to American schools and top CIS programs. The old adage "competition breeds excellence" certainly holds true when it came to basketball on the North Shore in the mid-2000s.

"The North Shore was completely competitive," said Sacre. "West Van was really good, they had a bunch of players at that time. Carson Graham, they just always had athletes, I don't know where they came from but they always had athletes. And of course, there was Argyle."

The grind to get there is why winning the provincial title with Handsworth in 2006 – the Royals beat perennial power Kitsilano 82-65 in the championship game – stands out among his most cherished basketball memories.

"It was one of the best experiences of my life," said Sacre. "I look back at it and I still remember that day like it was yesterday. I'm so happy I got to experience that with some of the great guys that were on my team."

One of Sacre's beloved teammates was Quinn Keast, who [died tragically in a pedestrian accident](#) on the night of his graduation in 2006. Sacre carries Keast's legacy with him – Keast lived by the mantra "No Regrets" – and the [Quinn Keast Foundation](#) has become an integral piece of the basketball community on the North Shore and across British Columbia.

"The name lives on and I'm very happy to see that even though he's not with us today all his hard work payed off," said Sacre. "He was a great guy and I'm happy there's an organization in his name."



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