



FBC All-American Evaluation Camp

*By Katy Vine, Texas Monthly
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Brooklyn heights: the gym rats want her to keep dunking. Her coaches want her to play "vanilla." So what does fifteen-year-old Fort Worth phenom Brooklyn Pope want? To give the other team a stomachache.

DURING THE SATURDAY GAME of the March 2004 Adidas All-American West Coast Evaluation Camp in Los Angeles, one of those perennial shoe-company-sponsored all-star gatherings for high school basketball players, a few of the game's top women's college coaches must have wondered if they were suffering from some sort of collective amnesia. How else to explain having never heard of Brooklyn Pope, the five-foot-eleven-inch girl wearing the thick, wire-rimmed glasses who was running circles around some of the best players in the country? Every other ris-



ing senior on the court that day had been on their recruiting radar for years. Many of them had already committed to one of the big dogs: Juanita Ward to Mississippi, Charde Houston to UConn, Kirsten Thompson to Arizona State. But as the game dragged on, the unheralded and unsigned Brooklyn Pope was making her high-profile opponents look stone-tired.

In the second half, she took a pass on a wide-open fast break and appeared to be heading for a routine layup. Instead, she picked up her dribble and took two giant steps inside the key. Rising up to the backboard with the ball held high in her right hand, she hammered it into the basket. Then, as if to make sure everyone was watching, she hung on the rim for a few seconds on the way down. Never mind that the ball clanked off the back of the rim and ricocheted toward half-court: Some unknown player under six feet tall had just tried to dunk in a girls' high school bas-



ketball game. And so the one hundred or so coaches in the stands hopped to their feet and did what you'd expect any leader of a big-time program to do: They pointed to the school logos on their shirts and shouted toward Brooklyn as if to say, "Pick me! Pick me!"

But why hadn't they seen this girl before? Where had she been hiding?.

Brooklyn Pope was only in the eighth grade.

IF BROOKLYN IS READING THIS story, her coaches would rather that she stop right here. No need to let her get a big head, they'd say, from all the praise about to be lavished upon her. But it's hard to imagine that anything could surprise the fifteen-year-old small forward at this point. By last February, when Brooklyn was leading Fort Worth's Dunbar Lady Wildcats to their first-ever Texas high school basketball 4A final four in Austin--as a freshman--she was already the talk of the Stop Six neighborhood. Wherever she went, neighbors bragged about how she was already six feet two and still growing. About how she was averaging 16.8 points, 8.5 rebounds, and 3 blocked shots a game. How before the season even began she'd already won Most Out-

standing Player at the Adidas Elite 100 Superstar Camp in September and Slam magazine had gushed that she'd "outhustled, outsmarted, and pretty much outplayed everybody on the court" in July's Adidas Top Ten Girls All-American Basketball Camp in Atlanta. Even the man who ran the West Coast camp, Ray Mayes, testified: "I think Brooklyn be the best player to come out of Texas, period. And one of the top five to play the game. I haven't seen a kid with that much broad skill and ability in a long time. LeBron James, maybe, is the last time I saw somebody play with that skill at that age." That seemingly impossible comparison didn't sit well with some of the talkers, though, who said that with Brooklyn's size and dribbling skill, she should really be compared to Magic Johnson.

Hype like this is probably inevitable when you're the first female superstar at Dunbar, an institution best known as the home of the winningest high school boys' coach in the country, 77-year-old Robert Hughes, and therefore the home of one of the most rabid basketball communities in the country. And it's been like this for Brooklyn since the seventh grade, when she opened the mailbox to find her first recruiting letter