

# Long Island University hoopster in 'Big Dance' has local tie to 502nd ABW

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When the “Big Dance” of men’s college hoops – the 2011 NCAA Division I Men’s Basketball Championship Tournament – gets underway this week, one mother at the 502nd Air Base Wing will be more interested in how a certain 6-foot, 7-inch forward is doing, rather than worrying about filling out any brackets.

Julian Boyd, a power forward wearing No. 42 for the Long Island University Blackbirds, is the son of Melodi Thames, executive assistant to the 502nd ABW commander, Brig. Gen. Leonard Patrick

LIU-Brooklyn, located in Brooklyn, N.Y., is seeded at No. 15 and



will face off against the No. 2 seed University of North Carolina Tar Heels (26-7) at 7:15 p.m. March 18 at the Time Warner Cable Arena in Charlotte, N.C., and will be televised on the CBS network.

Long Island (27-5) won the Northeast Conference’s automatic bid to the tournament by defeating Robert Morris on March 9 in the conference championship.

The Blackbirds have a nation-leading 13-game win streak and won a nation-best 13 road games during the season.



Julian Boyd

Long Island advances to the NCAA Tournament for the fourth time overall and first time

since 1997.

A redshirt sophomore for the Blackbirds, Boyd attended William H. Taft High School in San Antonio. But Boyd, the Northeast Conference Rookie of the Year for the 2008-2009 season, and a first-team All-Conference player this season, was lucky to be playing basketball at all.

Diagnosed with noncompaction cardiomyopathy after he collapsed while playing a pickup game in San Antonio, doctors told Boyd while the condition – which meant his blood was not circulating properly in his

heart – was treatable, but there was a strong probability he wouldn’t be able to play basketball again.

Boyd, who majors in sports management, sat out the 2009-2010 season and saw numerous doctors and underwent dozens of tests before being cleared to play again.

“It was a very difficult time when he was medically redshirted. He lost what he loved doing so much, which is basketball,” Thames said.

“He got through it with the love and support of family, friends and an incredible coach.

“I am very excited that after almost a year of constant medical appointments, tests, etc., from the top doctors at Mount Sinai Hospital in

New York, that he was cleared to play,” she said.

“I am still very guarded and nervous, and do worry about him as any mother would. I’m very excited for him, and just so happy he has the opportunity to be a part of something so big.”

As for her son’s team going up against the six-time NCAA national champion Tar Heels, Thames said “I understand what a great team they are up against, but Julian and his entire team are beyond ecstatic to be a part of this. They are going to give it all they got!”

The winner of the LIU-UNC game will advance to face the winner of No. 7 seed Washington and No. 10 seed Georgia March 20.