

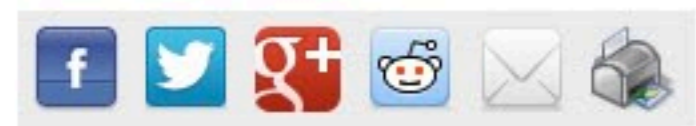
Prep boys' basketball: Brighton's Miller is a man on a mission

Brighton senior Brandon Miller is 36 points away from becoming school's all-time leading scorer.

By Christopher Kamrani | The Salt Lake Tribune
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Cottonwood Heights • He still remembers the impromptu full court set up in the basement of his old house, the two Little Tikes basketball hoops staring at one other from opposite ends of the floor as Brandon Miller drew two 3-point lines into the carpet.

That was where he used to give it his all to beat older brother Corbin, and where he used to make sure younger brother Brock, taller and very athletic, kept trying to climb the next step of the Miller ladder.



But the future Ute wants more than just a lasting legacy or his name hanging on high in the Brighton gym. He wants a ring, another chance to shine on the state's largest of stages.

The 6-foot-2 Miller sprints around in circles, slithering his way through picks and defenders in practice. He yells out defensive commands, commends teammates for executing the right way and, of course, swishes nearly every 3-point shot he hoists up.

"I look up to his toughness," said younger brother Brock, who is a sophomore on the team, "and his willingness to win."

That never has been questioned. Brandon Miller has had a ball in his hand since he could walk.

The Miller family has basketball roots that weave deep under the hardwood. Father Bret played at BYU-Hawaii. Grandpa Larry played at UNLV. Older brother Corbin, who is serving his LDS mission in Puebla, Mexico, is playing at Harvard.

So why Utah? Why a program that has, in recent years, withered far below its storied prestige?

"I have a lot of faith and I believe they'll turn it around, but it will take time," Miller said. "I think I'll be able to win a lot of games there."

A quote hangs in his bedroom, a quote he reads every morning when he steps out of bed and every night before he waits for the next day to come.

"Practice doesn't make perfect," he said with a long pause, "Perfect practice makes perfect."

These next six weeks, Brandon Miller has a shot at perfection.



At a glance

- Brandon Miller file**
- » Brighton senior guard, averaging 20 points per game and is shooting over 40 percent from 3-point land.
 - » University of Utah commit leaves for his two-year LDS mission to Buenos Aires, Argentina, on March 13.
 - » Set to graduate early from Brighton on March 7
 - » Older brother Corbin, currently on his LDS mission, is playing at Harvard. Father Bret played at BYU-Hawaii and grandfather Larry Miller played at UNLV.

Penning a 3-point line into old carpet as a kid is a fitting mark on the timeline for one of the state's premier scorers and long-range threats.

The Brighton senior and University of Utah commit can shoot it. He had drilled 57 3-point shots through Jan. 31, sinking 41 percent of his attempts from behind the arc. He's the leader of a Bengals team that is gaining steam as the Class 5A playoffs loom later this month.

"I'll run into him 50 years from now and say, 'Oh wow, dude, you hit 10 3s in one game,'" Brighton teammate Travis Devashrayee said. "He's a great shooter."

Miller did that against Copper Hills in a 39-point effort Jan. 22. The 10 treys tied him for third all time in the state record book for most 3-pointers made in a game.

But he's also on borrowed time, so to speak.

Six weeks from now, he'll be entering the Missionary Training Center in Provo, on his way to Buenos Aires, Argentina. When the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints lowered the minimum age requirement to serve a two-year mission from 19 to 18 in October, Miller, who is 18 until July 26, figured he'd explore the prospect of graduating early.

His explorations with his family and school counselor worked out to where he is set to graduate with his diploma as a Brighton Bengal on March 7.

He'll be a full-time missionary six days later.

"I'm definitely well aware of what's been going on and the decisions I've made," he said, "but since I'm so busy with everything. I'm just enjoying what time I have left of high school."

His mission for the next six weeks? Get Brighton back to the Class 5A state title game.

"His legacy is going to be he's a winner," Brighton's second-year coach Jeff Gardner said. "That's a legacy any great player would want."

There are mountains to climb, late-game shots to hit, defense to be played and, if it is written as meant-to-be, a rematch with Lone Peak in the 5A state title game — one last high school hurrah against Nick Emery and TJ Haws and the Knights, a group Miller grew up playing with since the second grade.

"More this year than ever, I've just tried to cherish as much as I can and enjoy as much as I can," he said, "but my mindset remains the same for every game."

There aren't many star high school athletes who have a significant amount of work to complete in such a congested time frame, but Miller has proved his ability to rise to the occasion. He averaged 20 points per game in last year's run to the 5A title game.

But the short 40-minute drive southbound to Provo looms for Brighton's star, and as he reiterated, there is time to write the last chapter of his time as a Bengal.

"I plan on picking up right where I left off," he said.

Where he leaves off and with how many more accolades and memories is up to him in these final days of everyday high school life.

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