

Hometown duo hopes to play basketball at NCAA Division I level

BAYTOWN, TX — As Baytown natives who grew up playing in local youth basketball leagues and thrilling fans on the court as Goose Creek Memorial High School Patriots, Lee College basketball teammates Javonte Cooper and Julian Powell can easily find common ground with the children they meet and mentor in the community.

“These little kids come from the same place and see themselves growing up to be us, and we can see ourselves in them,” said Cooper, who relished the challenge of playing football at Goose Creek Memorial but always had a natural talent for basketball that led him to Lee College. “I tell them to be better than me. Stay on top of your grades and sports will take care of themselves.”

Powell, who rode motorcycles and dirt bikes as a child before trading boots for basketball shoes, shares similar advice with his siblings and the other young people who look up to him: “Learn as much as you can. You can achieve your goals if you put your mind to it.”

Now in their redshirt sophomore seasons with Lee, Cooper and Powell are looking forward to reaching their own goal of advancing their basketball careers at an NCAA Division I college or university. Both have battled to earn playing time on a talented team and mastered the more complicated schemes and game plans used at the collegiate level.

Their hard work will be on display this Saturday, Jan. 28, when Lee takes on Angelina College at the sports arena on campus. The team is hoping fans will “Pack the House” and “Rock the Red” for the game, filling the 1,500-seat arena and helping collect thousands of canned goods to feed the hungry in the local community. All fans 18 and under will receive free entry, along with anyone who brings two canned goods. Fans aged 19 and older that wear red will pay \$2, while those who do not wear red will pay \$5. Tip off is at 6 p.m.

Moving on to a bigger and better basketball program will likely also mean moving away from Baytown, where Cooper and Powell have been able to enjoy the comforts of home and familiar surroundings while adjusting to the rigors of life as a college student-athlete. In addition to a full slate of classes, practices and games, Lee has completed more than 530 hours of service to the local community since August. Cooper is also a founding member and president of Reaching Excellence Against Limitations (R.E.A.L.), a student organization that aims to educate and empower black males on campus.

“Playing for Lee College helps me look out for my mom and brothers,” Cooper said. “I’m not long distance so I can reach out and get to them if they need me.”

But creating a brighter future for their families is also why chasing the dream of a professional basketball career is so important.

“My family keeps me motivated,” Powell said. “I want to take care of them.”