

# Basketball Times

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## Meet Your Maker



Thon Maker

# Prep Profile

## Meet your Maker: 7-footer remaining in Class of 2016

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CHARLOTTE – Back in 2010, a lanky 13-year-old soccer player began the next leg in an unlikely journey across four countries to become one of basketball's next prodigies.

Thon Maker, now 18, has grown into a 7-footer with skills suited for both inside and out. He can truly handle the ball like a guard, at times dribbling the length of the court at Under Armour's All-America Camp and pulling up to shoot a 3-pointer. He is also a willing post-up player, finishing many a play with a slam dunk. And he plays hard. Though at 220 pounds he is still stick-figure thin, his is a surprisingly strong frame that is apparently forged with steel.

Thon Maker is the whole package – think of a young Kevin Garnett – deserving of at least being in the conversation for the best player in the Class of 2016.

On the first night of games at the camp, Maker thoroughly outplayed fellow big man DeAndre Ayton, generally considered the best player in the Class of 2017. Maker had 23 points and 17 rebounds in that contest. Ayton finished with seven points and six rebounds.

Maker was set to reclassify to the Class and 2015 and join the college ranks next season, perhaps by December of next season. But though he is a bright student with about a 3.5 gpa, the deadlines and the paperwork, combined with the pursuit of becoming better at his craft, created a stress that convinced him and his guardian, Ed Smith, to ditch those plans.

"Plus, it allows me another year to play with my brother," Maker said.

Thon and Matur Maker, a 6-9 guard in the Class of 2017, have played basketball together for only 18 months.

"It's exciting that we'll get a new season together," Matur said. "I want to keep developing, keep getting better."

They will play together again next season for Orangeville (Ont.) Prep while attending the Athlete Institute in Orangeville. Orangeville Prep also included

Jamal Murray, who will play next season at Kentucky. "Some days last year, Matur was our best player," Smith said. "But he's in the shadows."

The Maker brothers, who descend from the Dinka tribe, escaped with an aunt from the civil war in South Sudan when Thon was a child and eventually settled in Australia.

Smith, who has helped other Sudanese immigrants receive U.S. opportunities in basketball, discovered Thon there. Smith is a controversial figure for a num-

guard skills. No post. Now you're going to get big kids to guard you, take him off the dribble and score or go to the free-throw line.

"The worst thing you can do to a young player is destroy his confidence. When you eventually go to the post you'll be able to see the game from a point guard's perspective."

Maker said he now spends equal time working out as a post and perimeter player. He is also on a daily diet of seven meals to increase his bulk, though only gradually.

"A lot of people say, 'Bulk him up. Take him to 240, 250,'" Smith said. "And then the kid has back problems, knee problems, mobility problems."

"If we had reclassified, the plan was to get to 235, 240 pounds. When you get to college, you're going to be playing against guys who are three or four years older, so you've got to have grown-man strength. It's about being successful at each level you are at."

That level will be the preps for one more season and then the colleges for another.

There was speculation that the decision behind Maker's return to Canada next season – coupled with skepticism over whether Maker's actual

birthday is his listed date of Feb. 25, 1997 – was an attempt to circumvent NBA rules and to allow him to enter next season's draft as an international player. However, Smith said the Collective Bargaining Agreement states that once a player has participated in a game in the U.S., he can be considered an international player again only if he plays in another country for at least three seasons. Next year will be Maker's second in Canada.

Maker will definitely play at least one college season, they say. While his movement will likely raise red flags for the NCAA, such schools as Arizona State, Indiana and Kentucky are frequently mentioned as the leaders for his services.

"The idea is to be ready at the next, next level," Thon Maker said, "when that time comes."



*Thon Maker, in the white jersey, dominated the competition at the Under Armour All-America Camp.*

ber of reasons: in Australia, for removing the basketball talent from there; because of criticism directed at him by one of those Sudanese immigrants, former UConn player Ater Majok; because Thon Maker was bounced around to three schools over the past two seasons (two in Louisiana and another in Virginia) before settling on Orangeville Prep.

Yet, Maker shows no signs of the entitlement that permeates throughout today's young players, particularly for someone with his background. If Maker's talent and personality are any indication, Smith has done a masterful job with him.

"Traditionally, what people will do is take a tall, skinny kid and they'll stick him in the post," Smith said. "And the kid will get beat up and lose confidence. I said, 'Let's let you learn to be a guard.' He learned all