JUAN ANDERSON

Juan Anderson was one of the most highly recruited prep basketball players in recent East Bay history. His decision as a senior at Castro Valley High in 2011: Go to a big-time college and probably play less, or accept a mid-major offer and get a chance to star.

He took the high road, accepting an offer from Marquette University in Milwaukee, a rewarding decision.

“At Marquette, I got to experience some things nobody else will ever experience. I got a degree, a Sweet 16 (NCAA Tournament) ring, a Big East (Conference) championship.

“Playing in Madison Square Garden (in New York) and winning the Big East championship off a buzzer-beater. These are experiences you can’t buy.”

Great basketball experiences started early for Anderson, a driving force in Castro Valley’s only North Coast Section boys basketball championship in 2011. He played AAU basketball for the Oakland Stars, and later the Oakland Rebels, and landed in a talented crop of freshmen at Castro Valley High that included Roderick Bobbitt and Chris Read.

Anderson narrowed his choice of college to Marquette, Cal, Arizona State, Oregon and Texas, and chose the Golden Eagles in part because of ESPN.

“The Big East was the best league in the country,” he gushed. “On ESPN every night. Playing against (future) NBA players every night. I wanted to play against the best.”

The 6-foot-6 Anderson played 121 games at Marquette in four seasons, starting 77 of them. His senior season was his best: 8.3 points and 5.7 rebounds per game, shooting 49 percent from the field and 35 percent on 3-pointers.

The highlight of his college career was also a lowlight: One win from the treasured 2013 Final Four, Marquette was beaten by Syracuse in the Elite 8 in Washington, D.C., with President Obama in attendance.

Upon graduation, Anderson took his talents to Mexico, where he’s been a league champ, a league Finals Most Valuable Player, a two-time All-Star Game MVP and, this year, the league’s dunk champ, citing Vince Carter (“the greatest dunker ever”) as his inspiration.

He did all this while speaking mostly Spanish and splitting time with the Mexican National Team.

“My best basketball days are ahead of me,” said Juan. “I’m only getting better. I’m definitely going to keep pushing.”