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From left, Bobby Hurley, Danny Hurley and St. John's Coach Steve Lavin. The Hurley brothers took different routes to Staten Island. Danny coached nine years at St. Benedict's Prep.

THE COACHING HURLEYS ARE JERSEY'S BOYS

By HARVEY ARATON

Dan Hurley learned a few things about how to coach a basketball team from his Hall of Fame father. Nothing, apparently, about severing ties and moving on to the next job.

"He was never taught to leave," said Father Edwin Leahy, the headmaster at St. Benedict's Prep in Newark. "He didn't know how."

This became agonizingly clear to Father Leahy when Hurley tried to telephone in April with the news of his decision to conclude a nine-year run as the coach at St. Benedict's for the head coaching position at Wagner College. Father Leahy, the

recipient of a call from Hurley after every St. Benedict's game and a regular on the guest list to special Hurley family occasions, had been kept in the loop throughout the negotiation process.

He knew what was coming. But all he heard was hemming, hawing, hyperventilating and finally a hang-up.

"I couldn't finish, it got so painful," Hurley said, his voice breaking at the mere recall. "I couldn't contain my emotion. I said, 'I've got to call you back.'"

Consider the vortex in Hurley's brain at the time: yes, he believed he was ready for a challenge at the proverbial next level after rejecting overtures for an assistant's role at Pittsburgh and for the top job at

Marist. Yes, Wagner presented the desired conditions as an NCAA Division I program on Staten Island, which would not require him to uproot his family from his native New Jersey.

But then, April happened to be the month that Hurley's father was elected to basketball's Hall of Fame, the big one in Springfield, Mass., with James Naismith's name attached to it. And why? In large part because Bob Hurley Sr. did not know how to leave. Because he had committed himself to St. Anthony High School of Jersey City for almost four decades and counting of mentoring teenagers he thought needed him more than those who had made it to college.

In the mid-1980s, Hurley Sr. had his



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Danny Hurley coaching the Wagner men's basketball team at St. John's on Dec. 1.

Father Leahy moment after receiving an offer to be Pete Gillen's assistant at Xavier.

"I had sent one of my kids, David Rivers, to Notre Dame when Pete was an assistant there," he said. "We went out to Cincinnati and loved it, looked at schools for the kids, shook hands on a deal."

When his sons, Bobby and Danny, heard that they were moving to Ohio and would not get the chance to play for their father at St. Anthony, their chins sagged and their eyes screamed, "Please, Dad, no!" Within days, the deal was undone.

Skip Prosser, who died in 2007, took that Xavier assistant's job, later became the coach there and at Wake Forest. Bob Hurley Sr. stayed behind at the 240-student St. Anthony, won 25 state titles, coached his boys, sent Bobby to Mike Krzyzewski at Duke and Danny to P. J. Carlesimo at Seton Hall, and continued to be a sucker for those pained adolescent faces.

"By about 1991, it kind of became obvious that I wasn't going anywhere," Bob Hurley Sr. said.

When Dan Hurley began at St. Benedict's after four years as an assistant at Rutgers, he did not expect to springboard from the New Jersey high school wars to the madness of March. Big-time colleges do not make a habit of hiring from below. Dan and Bob Hurley Sr. could only think of one man who made that jump: Bob Wade, who coached at Maryland in the 1980s straight out of Baltimore's Dunbar High School.

Bob Hurley Sr. said the sport — at least the scholastic version — was better off for not having its coaches climbing on the backs of players, as is routinely done in the college game.

"We live in a culture where nobody wants to wait for anything," he said. "Everybody's fast-tracking from here to there."

Asked by Father Leahy to stay at least three years at St. Benedict's, Dan Hurley built a powerhouse, losing 21 games in nine years. He felt as if he had stepped, so to speak, right into the family business. He and his wife, Andrea, bought a home in Freehold, and settled with their two sons into a familiar Jersey life.

"I could see myself staying at St. Benedict's for 40 years, doing what my dad did," he said.

But along with success came inquiries, and beyond his competitive ambition, the bonus attraction of being a head coach in college was the possibility of working with his brother. Living in Florida, Bobby had been marginally connected to basketball since a serious automobile accident curtailed his N.B.A. career, which came after his days as the point guard deluxe at Duke.

When Bobby was a senior at St. Anthony, Dan was a sophomore, in line for minutes and brotherly largess.

"He ended up having a problem with his finger," said Bobby Hurley, who at 39 is 18 months older than Dan. "He had surgery, didn't play. That would have been a

nice thing, to have played together."

Dan called Bobby and proposed their coaching together at Wagner. To ease his transitional angst, he consulted his father. He even reached out to Carlesimo, whose strident coaching style had troubled him during a sensitive time of life, when the pressure and expectations of being Bobby's younger brother made him take a leave from the game.

Carlesimo had coached at Wagner — a private college of about 2,400 students with a hilltop campus overlooking the Narrows — from 1976 to 1982 and had enough success there to land him at Seton Hall and later in the N.B.A.

Last spring, Dan Hurley drove to the Wagner campus, walked around and spoke to no one. He liked the feel of the place, which reminded him of Seton Hall, and he became intrigued by the challenge of a team that was 5-26 under Mike Deane last season.

He took the job, hired his brother and came to the realization that his situation was unlike his father's.

"St. Anthony needs my dad to stay operational, to stay open," he said. "St. Benedict's thrives as a great school, whether or not the basketball team is nationally renowned. So I didn't have the guilt of thinking, If I move on, this entire community of children and faculty and administrators could be in trouble."

Even then, Father Leahy said, the call back was tortured. "I almost had to resign for him," the headmaster said.

Settling in at Wagner, Hurley has coached the Seahawks (4-4) to early-season victories on the road over Stony Brook and Bucknell, and competitive losses to Hofstra and St. John's. On the national recruiting trail, Bobby Hurley has learned that most high school players are not too familiar with Wagner but may know of the family's high school legacies at St. Anthony and St. Benedict's. And the fathers will invariably say, "You're the point guard from Duke!"

If enough good players come, if the Hurleys can continue the family tradition of winning and drive Wagner to a Northeast Conference title or two, Dan's telephone will likely ring again.

"That, for him, will be the toughest challenge, because the next offer could be to leave New Jersey," Father Leahy said. "Dan is his father, and none of this will ever be easy. On the phone, I had to tell him, 'Dan, follow your heart.' But this time, somewhere else at least was right over the bridge."