

Cover Story

With seemingly too much energy to burn, Arizona State's Remy Martin has proven himself to be equally adept as a scorer or a distributor. But his legacy might become something that can't be measured by a statistic.

'That kid was fun to watch'

By Carson Breber



Ultra-quick guard Remy Martin calls basketball his first love.

Ask Remy Martin why he loves basketball, and he'll tell you he just feels like it's meant for him: the fast paced, back and forth nature of the game; the immediacy of a player's impact on the crowd, the bounce of the ball; the adversity posed within each contest and the teammates whom he endures it with.

His favorite play is a "no look, between the legs pass," appropriately thrilling for a man who seems to be constantly buzzing on the court, frequently throwing head fakes as he alternates between hesitation dribbles, bursts to the cup and audacious pull up jumpers.

He fondly remembers an AAU team from his early adolescence as "basketball at its purest," and his Arizona State profile cites the title he won coaching a group of 11- and 12-year-olds at Bobby Hurley's summer camp as his favorite moment from his time at the school.

A video that captured the scene suggests he's telling the truth. While the youngsters scream and swirl with jubilation, it is Martin who jumps the highest, initiates a chest bump with one player and then grabs another, running around with the boy in his arms.

Martin describes himself as "quiet" in life, but he is effusive on the court. A skillful bounce pass to execute a two-for-one prompts him to jump up and down, waving his arms in childlike excitement. An acrobatic finish leaves him roaring in celebration as he spins in circles. Almost every bucket leads him to take a quick hop before running back on defense, as if he has more energy than he could ever possibly exhaust in a game.

"It takes over my body," Martin

said. "There's nothing that I can do about it. A defensive stop, a charge, a dunk – they just move me in a whole other way that I can't really explain."

His signature passion, or, as Martin describes it, "pure love," is at the root of every area in which he excels: determined work ethic, malleable play style and a general compulsion to do whatever is necessary for the team to win.

Those traits have driven him, at just 6-foot-0, to his status as one of college basketball's best point guards, at the center of Arizona State's prolific, up-tempo offense and its most successful stretch of hoops in decades.

Martin was, in some ways, born into basketball – having a Filipino mother, he recalls watching the Lakers of the early 2000s with his uncles, embedded into a culture that has long adored the sport – but his love was mostly intrinsic.

The first time Martin took the court, he gleefully sprinted past defenders without dribbling, already demonstrating top-notch speed. He hadn't quite mastered the rules, but he loved the feel of the game, and although he showed more promise in baseball and football throughout his childhood, basketball was always his preference.

Yet there were always two sides to Martin's zeal, as with the unconditional love came an absolute hatred of losing.

Sam Martin, Remy's father, can vividly recall the first instance in which that became apparent; Remy was 8 or 9 years old, playing in a recreational league and facing off against a team led by his best friend at the time. In the midst of a comeback, his team trailed by one point with eight seconds remaining.

As the opposition inbounded the ball, Remy intercepted the pass and broke away for an open layup on the left side.

He missed.

As Remy watched the opposing team celebrate, devastated, he didn't cry or pout – but his takeaway from the defeat was apparent.

"You could just see he was like, 'I'm not gonna let this happen again,'" Sam said. "I don't like this feeling."

As Remy matured, he began to understand how to prevent that feeling: by outworking the competition, a value that Sam helped instill in him by prescribing a set of daily dribbling drills. Still, Remy would occasionally try to shortcut the exercises, prompting Sam, who was inevitably watching from inside, to appear and tell his son to start from scratch.

Remy became particularly inspired when, as a middle schooler, he saw local high school star Jrue Holiday dominate an opposing team so effortlessly that he began to shoot left handed in the second half. Later that night, Martin got to work on his left hand, and his efforts to cheat the drills diminished.

He understood the importance of hard work and unselfish basketball early, the latter of which he obtained through his AAU team, where he shared the keys to the offense with two other gifted ballhandlers in Kihei Clark and Mike Meadows, now guards at Virginia and Eastern Washington, respectively.

But Martin was always the star – he was the quickest and the most skilled, a trend that continued throughout high school when, although he feels he was underrated, he was a highly touted four-star recruit at national powerhouse Sierra Canyon.

Dominating in transition, reversing dunks, firing no-look dimes and throwing lobbs to his superb running mate Marvin Bagley III, Martin ran the show and smiled through it all.

That dynamic changed when Martin arrived in Tempe, Ariz., where he became just one part of the elite offensive guard core that earned Arizona State the nickname "Guard U."

With seniors Tra Holder, Shannon Evans and Kodi Justice averaging a combined 47.4 ppg, Martin's skillset as an explosive scorer and lead ball handler became extraneous, and he was accordingly assigned to the bench, a source of frustration for him initially.

"I wanted to be a starter," Martin said. "Who doesn't? That's the competitive side of me."

Yet Sam saw the avenue through which that competitiveness would be most productive, and accordingly offered Remy a simple piece of advice: "If you want to play, you have to do what they don't."

That meant, primarily, distribute the ball, as the seniors all played with a primarily score-first mentality, and "pick up your man for 90 feet" on defense.

Martin embraced that role wholeheartedly. He regularly changed the momentum of games, bursting off the bench with unrivaled energy and transition potency and, even more notably, playing ferocious defense, which further empowered Arizona State's fast-paced style by forcing turnovers at a high clip.

It was the embodiment of a value his father had long preached.

"I always told him, you can take away everything else, but nobody can take away your enthusiasm to

play the game," Sam Martin said. "Just play hard and good things will happen."

They did. The Sun Devils rose as high as No. 3 in the AP poll that season, and Martin was named the Pac-12's Sixth Man of the Year for his efforts.

Martin might not look the part of a versatile player – he doesn't have coveted long arms or tremendous switchability, and he is certainly at his best with the ball in his hands – but, in that season, he showed his ability to thrive in various roles, largely due to sheer determination.

Martin displayed his malleability again as a sophomore, when he played alongside future NBA players Zylan Cheatham and Luguentz Dort. Again, Martin would not be the team's top scoring option, so he scaled up his playmaking accordingly, averaging five assists per game, second in the Pac-12.

His junior season presented an entirely different challenge. With Cheatham and Dort's departures, Martin's scoring burden increased dramatically with a less offensively inclined squad around him.

To best prepare for that role, Martin consistently woke up between 3 and 5 a.m. to work out in the offseason, citing Kobe Bryant's fabled early morning

shotmaking came a level of recklessness that inhibited his ceiling, reflected by his 3.1 turnovers per game as a junior.

With that in mind, Martin emphasized taking care of the ball, cutting down on the flashy plays and ill-advised shots and making quick, decisive reads out of the pick and roll, all adjustments that would help him at the next level.

"Guys are so talented at this point, it's just all about the quick decisions," Martin said. "I learned that the hard way, but I definitely learned it."

As Martin strived toward those goals, he did so with yet another role change in mind.

"When you get to the NBA, everybody was once a star in their previous situation," Martin said. "You have to buy into your role, because at the end of the day you have to give the ball up to James Harden, you have to get the ball to Luka Doncic."

Martin ended up withdrawing from the draft in early August, delaying his NBA pursuit, but said that his pro-style offseason practice has "slowed down" the collegiate game for him, a development that Hurley has noted through his decision making.

"He's still scoring the basketball without the (same) volume of attempts," Hurley said. "Whether it's pass aheads or hitting the paint and finding an open teammate, I know he's very focused on making everyone better."

Along with his growth as a player, Martin said his draft preparation affirmed his belief that basketball is his "purpose" in life.

"You see people out there who don't really love the game and you're like, 'Wow, he's doing this, and he doesn't really love it like that,'" Martin said. "Imagine if I get my foot in the door and I really get to show people that this game is more than just a game. It's literally my first love."

Although Martin has not yet had a crack at his NBA dream, the heart with which he plays has had a marked impact on many of those who have seen it up close at the collegiate level.

As an example: Two years ago, following Arizona State's overtime loss to Oregon in the Pac-12 tournament,

Remy and his family grabbed dinner at a restaurant near the arena.

Throughout the meal, Sam Martin said some 20-30 Arizona fans approached Remy in packs, all with an identical message: "I know you go to ASU, but man, I love watching you play."

In another instance, Martin's parents saw a video on Twitter of a toddler miming a dribbling motion, claiming to be impersonating Remy.

To Sam, who was so touched by the clip that he helped arrange for Remy to meet with the young boy, the takeaway from those experiences is obvious.

"It doesn't matter who you are," Sam Martin said. "When you watch him play, you leave the game saying, 'Man, that kid was fun to watch. I love that kid.'"

For now, as he continues to entertain, Martin remains keyed in on developing his craft, winning games and, ultimately, recaching the NBA, extending the life of his career in the sport he said he would play if he "didn't make a dime."

"I just believe in myself so much that I feel like it's going to happen," Martin said. "I'll do whatever it takes to be able to get my name called."



Remy Martin stood out as a distributor and became a scorer when needed.

training sessions as inspiration.

Alongside his trainer Daniel Marsh and "right-hand man" Jake Sweeney, assistant director of basketball operations at Arizona State, Martin placed a particular focus on physical strength and shotmaking, which he attacked with precision.

"Sometimes we wouldn't talk for 30 minutes to an hour," Sweeney said. "He'd be listening to music, hood up, locked in and focused on putting the best effort he could into every rep."

Martin proceeded to average 19.1 ppg that season, second best in the conference, as he propelled Arizona State to its third consecutive 20-win season for just the second time since the 1960s.

Martin missed out on his chance to carry his team through an NCAA Tournament run when the season was cancelled because of COVID-19. He made the best of the circumstances by immediately heading to Las Vegas, where he would spend the next five months working to develop his game with plans to enter the NBA draft.

In that process, Martin continued to improve upon his body, but also focused on a long-held critique of his play – that with his spectacular passes and contested