After a dominant career at Michigan City High School in Indiana, Jarrod Jones was a hot commodity. Xavier wanted him. So did Purdue. A number of big-name basketball schools were interested in bringing Jones, a 6-foot-9 power forward with long arms and quite a bit of muscle attached to his 230-pound frame to their schools to play ball.

He was exactly what a big-time program needed…a physical specimen that not only got the job done on the court, but in the classroom as well.

Then Jones got a bad break. Literally.

He was on an unofficial visit to Notre Dame and got involved in a pick-up game. While pulling down a rebound Jones landed awkwardly, breaking his left leg.

Suddenly he was no longer hearing from the big-time programs; obviously there was no guarantee Jones would be the same player when his leg had healed.

However, one school was there the entire time…before the fateful trip to Notre Dame, during

the painful rehabilitation, after the most difficult part – when the rehab was done but the doctors had not yet cleared Jones to play – and when Jones was finally back on the court and ready to make his college decision. Ball State never had second thoughts, and was rewarded when Jones announced he was heading to Muncie to play for the Cardinals.

He paid instant dividends…going for 21 points and 13 rebounds in his collegiate debut and ending up running away with Mid-American Conference Freshman of the Year honors. Jones led the Cardinals in scoring (11.2 points per game) and rebounding (7.3 rebounds per contest) his freshman year and ended up on the All-MAC Honorable Mention list, the first freshman to be so honored in the conference since 2005.

His sophomore season saw more of the same, with Jones again leading the Cardinals in both scoring (12.2) and rebounding (7.4). He also ended up fourth in the conference in blocked shots with 34, twice was named the MAC West Player of the Week and earned Honorable Mention All-MAC honors for a second straight season.

This year, as a junior, Jones has elevated his game considerably and has his Cardinals (10-4, 2-0) sitting atop the MAC West standings. He is scoring 16.5 points per game, fifth in the MAC, and grabs 8.9 rebounds per contest, second in the conference. Jones has won MAC West Player of the Week honors twice this season, and has also earned MAC Scholar Athlete of the Week recognition two times.

Jones is a legitimate NBA first round draft pick candidate. The scouting report on him by NBADraft.net compares him to Kurt Thomas, who had a very solid NBA career, and provided the following scouting report on Jones last season:

Strengths: Late blooming PF out of Indiana who the major conference schools missed on ... Put up outstanding numbers as a freshman and has the look of a player who hasn't yet come close to maximizing his abilities ... Should become a dominant player in the MAC as early as this season ... Shows a solid ability to use pump fakes and even put the ball on the deck to create scoring opportunities ... At 230, he's got a solid body and should be able to naturally add the necessary 20-25 lbs of muscle to his frame over the next 2 seasons without losing a great deal of agility ... Has good strength already and should continue to improve ... Long arms (7-2 wingspan), wide shoulders and frame give his outlook a lot of intrigue ... Baby pythons (arms) beginning to show intriguing strength ... Shows excellent footwork with the ability to get by defenders in the paint using his superb foot speed ... Has a nice assortment of drop steps and

up-and-unders he utilizes in the post. His post skills show solid development and potential ... Loves to use the spin move when attacking the basket ... Does a good job of fighting for position in the paint ... Shows a nice right handed jump hook ... Agility for player his size is unusual in the MAC ... Length allows him to gather a great deal of rebounds ... Displays a good motor and a solid understanding of the game ...

Weaknesses: Mid-range jump shooting is a work in progress (needs to extend his shooting range) Really struggled shooting from the perimeter as a freshman, but showed improvement as the season went along ... At this point he is pretty ineffective shooting outside of 8 feet but shows decent fundamentals and the potential to improve ... Must continue to work on his strength ... As a freshman at times he would rush shots, so becoming more disciplined with his offensive decision making is an area to improve on ... Needs to cut down on turnovers. His hands are good, but too often he makes turnovers when facing the basket and trying to attack with the dribble (will improve with experience) ... Smaller conference makes it more of a challenge to receive deserved recognition.

Notes: Jones has the potential to eventually become a first rounder ... Unfortunately he finds himself at the most talent laden position (PF) among draft prospects right now ... He would benefit by being patient and developing his game for the next 2-3 years.

Jones should return for his senior season and, if he does, should improve his draft stock quite a bit. Not only that, but the Cardinals are primed to make some noise in both the MAC Tournament as well as the NCAA or NIT Tourneys, whichever one they end up competing in at the end of the season. Ball State, right now, should be considered the favorites to represent the MAC in the 2010-11 NCAA Tournament, and if they can pull off an upset or two the exposure would do nothing but help Jones, who said he wants to play at the next level when his college career is over.