

Michael Thorpe: an artist on and off the court

By **Marvin Pave** Globe Correspondent, Updated March 4, 2020, 5:54 p.m.



Michael Thorpe with one of his intricate textile creations.

Last weekend Newton North High basketball coach Paul Connolly, the school’s volleyball coach Richard Barton, and Emerson College basketball coach Bill Curley walked into the All Too Human clothing boutique in Boston.

The visit had nothing to do with their wardrobes.

They were there to support one of the best players they had ever coached, Michael Thorpe, a Globe All-Scholastic in basketball and volleyball while at North, and a career 1,000-point scorer in high school and college.

The occasion was the first showing of Thorpe’s exhibit “An Art Show,” featuring his 17 multicolored quilts.

“I take a photograph and transform them into how I see the world, recreating them

on textiles,” said Thorpe, whose mother, Susan, is a master quilter and guides him on her long-arm quilting machine.

“She taught me everything I know,” said Thorpe, 26, a photojournalism major at Emerson, where he was a four-year starting point guard.

A 2016 graduate, he worked for renowned photographer Lou Jones, then explored other outlets for his artistic talents, including music and sculpture.

A quilted self-portrait he created six months ago at the West Newton home he shares with his mother was a confidence-boost.

“That really changed my trajectory,” said Thorpe, who uses a tightly woven batik fabric, supplied by his aunt, Lisa McCarthy, owner of Compass Point Quilt in East Kingston, N.H.

Thorpe, who works fulltime as a material designer for Converse Shoes in downtown Boston, feels sports and competition relate to being a visual artist.

“Both take time, effort, and repetition,” he said. “It’s like perfecting a shot, or a drawing, dedicating every day to get better.”

At Newton North, where he captained the basketball and volleyball teams, Thorpe helped lead both to numerous post-season tournaments, including the 2011 South Sectional basketball final at TD Garden.

On the volleyball court, the 5-foot-11 Thorpe, an outside hitter and setter, totaled a career 1,500 kills and 201 assists. On the basketball floor, he was a three-time Bay State Conference All-Star and the conference MVP in 2012.

As an Emerson sophomore, Thorpe, who was coached his first two seasons by former Boston College coach Jim O’Brien, scored 21 points to spark a 90-79 win over defending national Division 3 champion Amherst College, halting their 29-game winning streak.

His many friendships at Emerson included Patrick Labadia, who managed the equipment distribution center where Thorpe picked up his cameras.

Labadia is now a design specialist at All Too Human, located at 236 Clarendon St., where Thorpe’s creations can be viewed between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. Monday through Saturday until the end of the month.

“On opening night,” said Thorpe, “the line wrapped around to Newbury Street. It was like a reunion with former teammates, coaches and professors, and friends from Newton and Emerson.”

“It was beyond my wildest dreams.”



Newton North's Michael Thorpe is pictured in action in a game between Newton North and Walpole High. JIM DAVIS/GLOBE STAFF/THE BOSTON GLOBE