

# This is the story of how this Haitian-born basketball player got to Miami Dade College

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Miami-Dade college basketball player Dev Ostrowski speaks with Miami Herald writer Walter Villa on campus in Miami, Florida on Monday, September 23, 2019. BY [DANIEL A. VARELA](#)

It started with a bit of clever subterfuge — a pizza slice hidden in a book shelf.

Later, a quesadilla turned up in the toy bin.

Miami Dade College freshman point guard Dev Ostrowski is now a physical specimen at 6-1, 185 pounds, able to bench press 265. But, for the first five years of his life, the Haitian native went hungry — a lot. And even when he was adopted by the Ostrowskis — Steven and Susan from Connecticut — old habits died hard, which is why he hid his food.

“It took time,” said Steven Ostrowski, an English professor at Central Connecticut State University. “It took about two years until Dev realized he would never go hungry again.”

Dev Ostrowski, 19, has made an incredible adjustment to life in the U.S. — he plays the piano as well as basketball, he has a 3.5 grade-point average, and his abilities have led to him getting recruiting interest from several universities, including Brown of the Ivy League.

<https://www.miamiherald.com/sports/college/state-college-sports/article235341702.html>

But among all of Ostrowski's talents, perhaps his best attribute is his relentless positivity. He harbors no ill will toward the couple who gave him up for adoption. Quite the opposite, he's grateful.

"I got transferred to the orphanage when I was three years old," said Ostrowski, whose birth father was a farmer in a small village. "My [birth] parents couldn't support me. It was the best option. I don't blame them."

Susan and Steven, who have two older, birth children, first seriously pondered adoption when a woman came to their church selling statues as a fundraiser for the orphanage in Haiti.

Adoption was something Susan and Steven had talked about for years, and this chance meeting provided the impetus. Steven was all in on the adoption idea, but he says his wife did the lion's share of the work needed to make it happen.

"She's a dynamo," Steven said of his wife, a speech pathologist who has started her own business creating reading material for people with dementia.

Led by Susan, the Ostrowskis — including their two children who were 9 and 13 at the time — traveled to Haiti, where they met Dev at a tiny yet overcrowded orphanage that housed more than 100 children.

The Ostrowskis flew into Port-au-Prince but not without trepidation. Haiti can be a dangerous place. But they were met at the airport by a pastor who works with the orphanage, and he took them on a two-hour drive to Dev's village, Petion-Ville.

"It was the first time we had seen such squalor and poverty," Steven said. "It was devastating.

"When we walked into the orphanage, all the kids surrounded us. It was overwhelming. But when we met Dev, and he looked at us with his big eyes, we fell in love right then. Whatever it was going to take, we were going to make it happen."

The adoption process took 20 long months, but it was worth it, Susan said.

"We had been intellectually committed to adoption," she said. "But when we saw Dev, we became emotionally committed."

When Dev was in the fifth grade, Susan took him to Haiti to see his birth parents. Also on that trip was one of Susan's friends, who ended up adopting Dev's birth brother, Geralson, who was 10 at the time.

Geralson is now 22 and a cross-country runner at Lasell University, a Division III school in Massachusetts.

"Maybe Dev doesn't remember because he was so young, but being in the orphanage was traumatic," Geralson said. "I'm very proud of my brother."

## **NO EXCUSES**

Dev Ostrowski, who said being part of a multi-racial family has not been an issue, has two tattoos. On his right arm are the words: "Remember where you came from." On his left arm are the words: "No excuses. Make it happen."

He made it happen as a high school player at East Lyme in Connecticut, averaging 29.1 points, 6.0 rebounds, 5.0 assists and 4.5 steals as a senior.

Coaches and athletic directors throughout the state named him the Connecticut Player of the Year, yet big-time colleges weren't interested.

"I was very surprised he didn't get Division I scholarship offers," East Lyme coach Jeff Bernardi said. "We play in a good conference, but it's not one of the best. College coaches saw Dev scoring, but they wanted to see him do it against better competition.

"Look, he's a highly athletic kid with a 1300 SAT. He's a coach's dream – a fantastic player and an even better person."

Ostrowski was lightly recruited due in part to some bad breaks. In the summer prior to his senior year, he sat out much of the AAU season due to appendicitis. Then, toward the end of his senior season, he fractured his right foot. East Lyme was 13-3 before he got hurt and 1-5 after his injury.

MDC coach Kevin Ledoux found out about Ostrowski from one of his assistants, Chris Vincent, who is from Connecticut and knows the area's basketball talent.

“Dev is a special person and a talented athlete who can really score,” Ledoux said. “I’m from New England, too. It’s sometimes hard to get recruited there because there isn’t a powerhouse league.”

At MDC, Ostrowski is making the transition from scorer to the role of a true point guard who sets up his teammates. It’s a transition.

But given what Ostrowski has already overcome in his life, learning to play the point should be relatively simple.

“My sole purpose of being here is exposure,” Ostrowski said.

As for his adoptive parents, Ostrowski said they are his role models.

“I look up to them,” he said. “They taught me to be a better person, how to work on your brain, your body and your spirit, too.

“It’s the perfect story, the perfect situation. I couldn’t ask for better.”



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Miami Dade College basketball player Dev Ostrowski takes note of MDC coach Kevin Ledoux at The Gibson Center in Miami, Florida on Monday, Sept. 23, 2019. DANIEL A. VARELA [DVARELA@MIAMIHERALD.COM](mailto:DVARELA@MIAMIHERALD.COM)