

**I**t's your typical big brother-little brother tale - and then some.

Brothers grow up in a basketball family. Big brother goes off to college and is a star. Big brother plays professionally. Little brother follows in tow, with big shoes to fill. Same school. Same expectations.

It's a story Nebraska junior forward Troy Piatkowski is all too familiar with.

Piatkowski has had to follow in the footsteps of his brother, Eric, who played for NU from 1990-94, was a two-time first team All-Big Eight Conference selection and is the second leading scorer in Cornhusker history. Eric Piatkowski now plays for the Los Angeles Clippers in the NBA.

Troy Piatkowski said he knows he'll never be as good as his brother. The statistics say the same.

Eric Piatkowski was a part of four NCAA Tournament teams. Troy Piatkowski hasn't been a part of any. Eric Piatkowski averaged double figures in points all four years as a Husker. Troy Piatkowski has yet to reach that plateau, averaging a modest 7.0 points per game this season.

"It never bothered me that my brother was a great player here," Troy Piatkowski said. "What bothers me is that everybody thinks I'm supposed to play the same way as my brother did and do the same things."

"Basically, I've been in his shadow ever since I came down here to play."

And he's had time to get used to it.

## The basketball clan

Growing up, the Piatkowskis had a steady diet of roundball. Their father, Walt, played professional basketball in the American Basketball Association from 1968-72. Along with brothers Dave and Sean, Troy and Eric Piatkowski had spirited battles on the hard court.

"There was the usual amount of competition among the brothers," Walt Piatkowski said. "A lot's been made out of how good of shooters Troy and Eric were, but their dad was still the best."

From the brothers' younger years through Rapid City (S.D.) Stevens High School, Troy Piatkowski said his family developed a reputation around its basketball prowess.

Most of it, Troy Piatkowski said, was brought on by Eric Piatkowski.

"Really Eric's the one that made the name for us," Troy Piatkowski said.

"Everybody would always say, 'Oh, here comes the Piatkowskis. Do they have a basketball in their hand?'" Troy Piatkowski said. "Every town we went to it was, 'Here comes the Piatkowskis, they must be good.'"

But those times were easy compared to the road Troy Piatkowski faced when he arrived at Nebraska.

## The struggle to achieve

Troy Piatkowski has a learning disability, dyslexia, which prevented him from playing his freshman season at Nebraska because he did not qualify academically.

"Troy's a person that does not have an easy time with school," Walt Piatkowski said. "Sometimes he'll read a defense wrong or have problems with a certain offense."

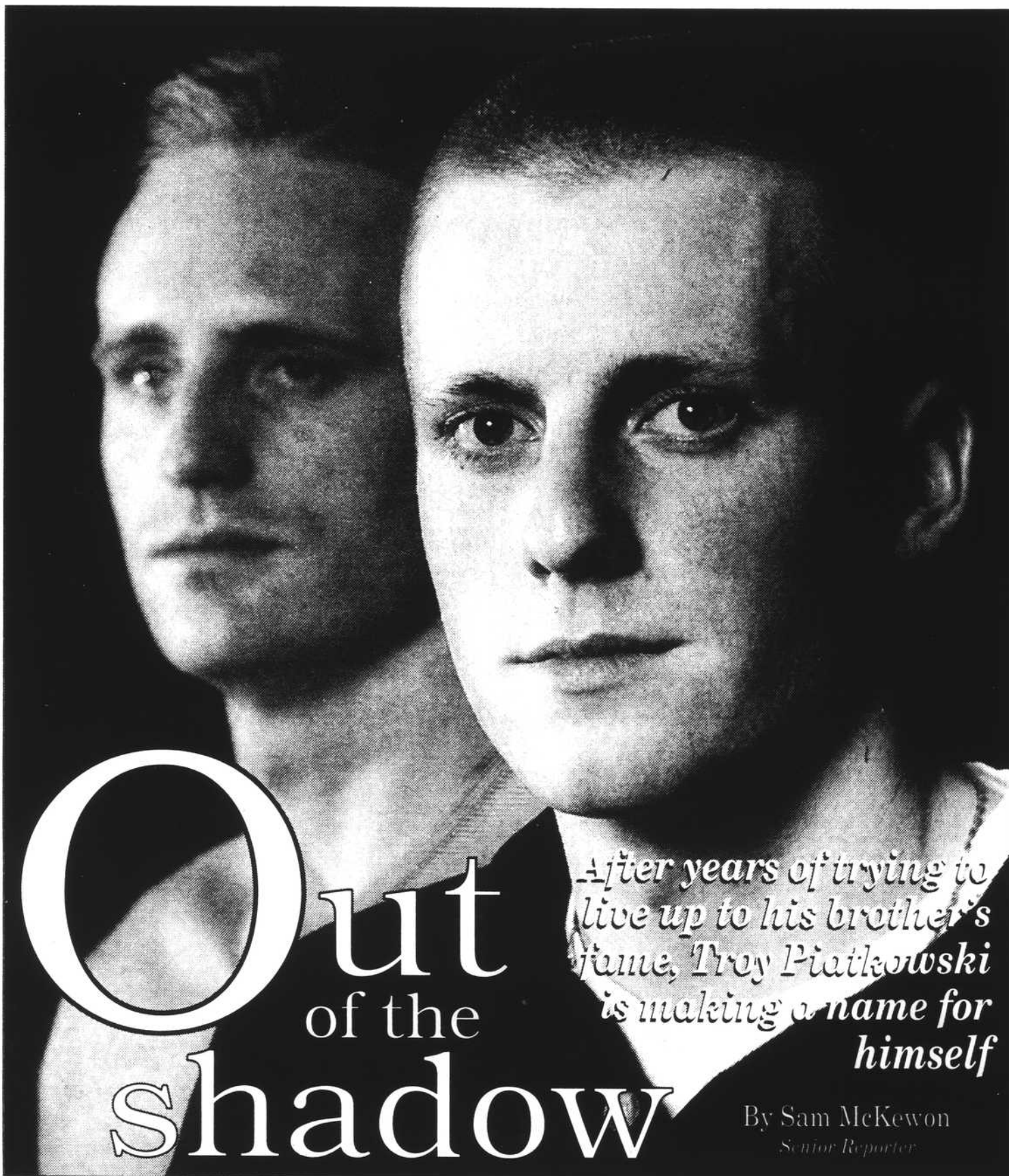
Because of his academic situation, Piatkowski could not practice with the team his first year at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and he was forced to hone his skills at the Campus Recreation Center.

Piatkowski said it was often he, current NU forward Larry Florence and former NU guard Alvin Mitchell who would make the trek to the campus rec to play pick-up games.

"It was pathetic," Piatkowski said. "We played against really average guys who would do anything they could to beat us. It didn't help me much to go there, but that's all I could do."

When his sophomore year began, Piatkowski said his playing chances looked good as NU Coach Danny Nee was prepared to start him at forward.

"Coach Nee said he already had me penciled in as the starter since I was practicing really well," Piatkowski said. "I was a



# Out of the shadow

*After years of trying to live up to his brother's name, Troy Piatkowski is making a name for himself*

By Sam McKewon  
Senior Reporter

MATT MILLER/DN

**NU FORWARD TROY PIATKOWSKI (front) has spent much of his life following in the footsteps of his older brother, Eric, now with the Los Angeles Clippers. Eric Piatkowski, who played at Nebraska 1990-94, is the Huskers second all-time leading scorer.**

shooter like my brother, and we needed one of those on the team."

Then the roof caved in.

Piatkowski made just 18 of 60 shots (30 percent), including a dismal 6 of 27 (22 percent) from 3-point range. He averaged 7.8 minutes per game while playing in 22 of 33 contests.

"I felt like I let Coach Nee and the fans down," Piatkowski said. "The level of play just overwhelmed me a little bit when I came in."

Though he had an 11-point game against Oklahoma State toward the end of the season, Piatkowski would have to wait until his junior year until he became the basketball player he wanted to be.

## Out of the shadows

The wake-up call for Piatkowski this season came in Hawaii during the Outriggers Rainbow Classic Dec 29. After starting in 10 games, Piatkowski said he had a "defensive breakdown" in a 87-62 loss to Hawaii.

"I realized out there the kind of basketball I wanted to play," Piatkowski said. "Offensively, I'm a shooter, and I had to take some pressure off the other guys."

Since that game, Piatkowski has come off the bench and scored in double figures three times, including a career-high 18 points against Kansas Feb. 1. He had 17 points in a 69-63 loss to Kansas State with his brother in the stands last Saturday.

Piatkowski also leads the Big 12 Conference in 3-point field goal percentage at 48.6 percent making 18 of 37 shots.

Nee said Piatkowski is developing into a solid offensive option for the Huskers.

"He's making and taking more big shots than he used to," Nee said. "He's looking for his shot more, and that shows his confidence."

Eric Piatkowski said Troy Piatkowski is becoming more of a factor from outside the arc.

"He's starting to find his spot on the floor and knows when to take that shot," Eric Piatkowski said. "Teams are starting to know that he's a great shooter."

Walt Piatkowski said he's proud of how his son has come through the tough times at Nebraska.

"Troy has really handled the whole situation well," Walt Piatkowski said. "It's incredible to see him shoulder all of the pressure like he has."

Possibly the most amazing thing about Troy Piatkowski's journey is that he was never forced to take it. He always could have chosen baseball.

## Diamond dreams

There are two qualities Troy Piatkowski possesses that baseball scouts love in a pitcher: his 6-foot-5 frame and his left hand.

Piatkowski was the top pitcher on his American Legion team in high school that went to the American Legion World Series

and lost in the semifinals. His performance throughout the summer of 1995 had people wondering whether basketball was the right sport for him.

"I had guys coming up to me at the regional tournament in Salina (Kan.) and telling me I'm crazy to have my son playing basketball," Walt Piatkowski said. "With his size, his potential as a baseball prospect is great."

For his part, Piatkowski said he had a choice when he came to Nebraska between the two sports.

"Coach Nee sat me down and said if I take the spikes out of the closet, I should just keep on playing baseball," Piatkowski said.

"I just like basketball's atmosphere a lot more. In baseball, as a pitcher, you only pitch twice a week and then you sit and watch the rest. I wouldn't like it as much."

Still, after his college career is over, Piatkowski said he would like to pursue his career in baseball.

"If I don't go overseas to play basketball, I'll put time into working my arm back up," Piatkowski said. "Baseball is definitely something I'd like to try."

Eric Piatkowski said he'll be happy to see his brother do whatever he wants at NU and after.

"I didn't expect him to be an NBA player or anything," Eric Piatkowski said. "I just want Troy to have much fun as he possibly can here."