

## Hembera could be Miss Basketball in 2015

Written by Jim Ecker

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Shelby Hembera of Cedar Valley Christian has been an inspiration this season to her teammates, coaches and the close-knit community that cherishes their small private school on the southeast side of Cedar Rapids.

It's not just the astronomical numbers she's produced on the basketball floor, but that's a good place to start.

Hembera, a 6-foot junior, leads the state in scoring and rebounding at 33.2 points and 15.9 rebounds this year. That's all classes - 5A, 4A, 3A, 2A and 1A - and nobody else is really close.

She tied the Metro record for most points in a single game when she poured in 44 Friday night against West Central, matching a performance by former Kennedy star Anne O'Neil in 2000. And she broke the Metro record for most rebounds in a single game Saturday when she grabbed 25 against Waterloo Christian.

She's had five games this season with 40 or more points, including two in a row. She's had eight other games with 30 or more points and seven other contests with 20 or more points. Her lowest total of the entire season is 21 points, which would be a career-high for most people.

She's already amassed 1,459 points and 705 rebounds in her remarkable career, giving her a clear shot at reaching 2,000 points and 1,000 rebounds next year as a senior.

That's incredible stuff, but it's not the most incredible part of her story. The most incredible part, from all accounts, is her total dedication and devotion to Cedar Valley Christian and her classmates.

For all her exploits, the Huskies have an unsightly 9-and-53 record with Hembera on the varsity the last three years, including a 1-and-19 mark this season. Cedar Valley won its first game

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Saturday against Waterloo Christian, 53-47, when Hembera had 41 points and those 25 rebounds.

She is not playing at Cedar Valley Christian for the numbers or the glory. She's playing for her school, for her friends and for her community.

Hembera could have bolted Cedar Valley and played at Kennedy High School this year. It was touch-and-go whether the Huskies would have enough players for a team this year and Hembera had the option of playing at Kennedy if Cedar Valley was unable to put a team together, because she lives in the Kennedy school district.

Cedar Valley would not have fielded a team this season if Hembera had told everyone she wanted to play at the Class 5A level at Kennedy so she could compete against stiffer competition and get more exposure for college basketball. She had every right to do that, but for her it was a simple decision to stay with the Huskies.

Cedar Valley has only eight girls on the roster, but one of them is a cheerleader who only plays in emergencies. If Hembera had left, the Huskies would have had only a half-dozen players of little or no experience and undoubtedly would have canceled the season, leaving Hembera free to play for Kennedy.

She knew that, but decided to stay. Instead of playing for a Kennedy team that's been ranked in the Top 10 in Class 5A and has a shot of playing in the state tournament, she's toiling away with a 1-and-19 team in Class 1A.

Hembera has scored 90 percent of her team's points this season. Twice, she's scored every point for her club in an entire game. She's had five straight games with 20 or more rebounds and rarely gets a moment's rest.

Hembera may not be the best player in the state, but she's awfully good and a legitimate college prospect. She's certainly one of the best young people in the state, and there will be a terrific way to salute her in style next season when she's a senior.

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If there's any justice, Shelby Hembera should be a strong candidate for Miss Basketball next season. It would recognize her accomplishments, but also send a strong message to everyone else about the value of being true to your school and your community.

She's set a fine example for everyone.