

## Oney, Armstrong help UNI reach new heights

Written by Jim Ecker

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Katelin Oney and K.K. Armstrong enjoyed remarkable basketball careers at Cedar Rapids Washington High School, and now the two best friends are helping the University of Northern Iowa women's basketball team scale new heights.



Oney and Armstrong helped Washington compile an 88-14 record during their four years with the varsity. They made the Class 4A state tournament each season and finished second, second, third and second in Des Moines.

Success has followed them to Cedar Falls. The Panthers won the Missouri Valley Conference tournament and reached the NCAA tourney for the first time in school history last season, and this year they are sitting in first place in the MVC standings near the midpoint of the regular-season campaign.

Oney and Armstrong, a pair of 5-foot-7 guards, graduated from Washington in 2008. Armstrong committed to Northern Iowa during the early part of the summer of 2007, but Oney waited a little longer before picking Northern Iowa as well.

"They were actually our first signees of the new staff," said UNI Coach Tanya Warren, in her fourth year at UNI. "We wanted to build our program starting with those two."



The Panthers are 14-5 overall and 7-1 in the Missouri Valley Conference heading into Saturday afternoon's home date with Bradley.

Oney, a starting guard, is tied for the conference lead in 3-pointers and ranks 10th in scoring at 10.5 points. Armstrong, a key reserve, ranks 10th in the MVC in free throwing shooting and is averaging 7.3 points, fourth-best on the team.

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Oney and Armstrong have known each other since kindergarten in Cedar Rapids and grew up playing basketball together for the Cedar Rapids Panthers. Oney's mother, Kathy, was one of their coaches.

They are roommates at UNI and best friends.

"She's always there for me, and I'm always there for her," said Armstrong. "We're pretty much inseparable, I guess you would say."

If you see one of them, you usually see the other. "It's great playing with K.K.," said Oney. "I love playing with her."

Warren refers to Oney as "K.O.," so the Panthers have K.K. and K.O. on the same club. They've been playing together for about 13 years.

"It's really been interesting to me, because they don't ever seem to get tired of each other," said Warren. "They're constantly with each other. That's a credit to them."

"K.O. knows what to say to K.K. when K.K. is frustrated on the floor, and vice versa. They know each other's strengths, they know each other's weaknesses and they play to that and make each other better."

Warren said recruiting them at Washington was never a package deal. She saw them as talented individuals, but naturally was delighted to get them both.

"You always recruit kids who fit your style of play," she said. "We knew we wanted to be a little more up-tempo in terms of being able to push the basketball. We wanted guards who could play the 1, 2 or 3 in our league, which both of those kids can."

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Warren said Armstrong gives UNI an athletic player who can get to the basket. She said Oney gives the Panthers a 3-point threat, along with an intangible.

"She just has a kind of toughness," said Warren. "That's what I love about her, her toughness and her ability to shoot the basketball with great range. I don't know if I've seen a kid with her toughness."

Oney averaged 2.8 points last season as a sophomore, but she seized an opportunity this year and has quadrupled her output. Oney had been limited in previous summers due to knee surgery and mononucleosis, but she was able to work on her game last summer and impressed the coaches with her improvement.

"I worked on my shot and getting a quicker release," she said. "I spent a ton of time in the gym this summer and in the preseason. I think all of that hard work has come to good use."

Northern Iowa finished 11-19 overall and 9-9 in the Missouri Valley Conference when Oney and Armstrong were freshmen. They improved to 17-16 overall and 10-8 last season, capped by their strong performance in the MVC tournament.

The players decided to stay in Cedar Falls last summer and work together as a team, another factor in this year's success.

"I think how we finished last year gave us a ton of momentum," said Oney. "I think everyone took that to heart and got in the gym and worked our butts off all summer. I think it (winning the MVC title) also gave us a ton of confidence."

Warren has enjoyed watching the two Washington graduates develop in Cedar Falls.

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"The two of them are having very good collegiate careers," she said. "Those two have played an extremely important part in how this program has progressed."