

Petersen, Burgart commit to Mustangs, Sedlacek to UNI

Written by Jake Koolbeck

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At a minimum the Jefferson J-Hawks will have three of their six seniors going on to play softball in college after this year.

Left fielder Rachel Sedlacek, pitcher Hannah Petersen and shortstop Carson Burgart all recently committed to play college softball next year. Sedlacek will head to Northern Iowa while both Petersen and Burgart have decided to attend Mount Mercy.

The group is excited to have the opportunity to play at the next level, but none of them are looking past this year. They all would like to end their high school career with a state title while enjoying one more year with their J-Hawk teammates.

“There is no explaining high school ball. These girls are my family and I can’t imagine not seeing them every day,” Petersen said. “My goals are to enjoy my last year and be the first 5A state champs.”

Sedlacek and Burgart agree. Both said they will miss their teammates and would like to win the state title.

Mount Mercy made a major haul in landing Petersen.

Petersen is a four-time first team all-district and all-Metro selection. Three times she has been named the Mississippi Valley Conference division player of the year. She also has also been named to the first, second, and third all-state teams during her career. Petersen was last year’s Metro player of the year and was considered a major college prospect.

Petersen said she had interest from lots of colleges but didn’t pursue many of them because she wanted to stay in state. Mount Mercy made it easy on her by offering her a large scholarship of which the details she cannot discuss. Petersen said she decided to commit early because Mount Mercy was a great school for what she wants to study and she could not turn down the money. She gave a verbal commitment, but is unsure when she will officially sign.

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Despite having Division I talent and possessing the long-time goal of playing at that level, Petersen said Mount Mercy is where she wants to be.

“Playing college softball is always where I was suppose to go, so yes, I reached my goal,” Petersen said. “D1 was my initial goal but I think a smaller school fits me much better.”

The money is not the only thing that drew Petersen to Mount Mercy. Petersen also liked its location and reputation as a good school for pre-medicine studies.

“Mount Mercy sold me because it was close to home and it was a great school for medicine,” Petersen said.

A special connection to Mount Mercy head coach Glen Johnson was also key to Petersen’s decision. Petersen and many classmates played their youth ball for Johnson as members of the Blue Devils program. Petersen is thrilled to have a chance to play for Johnson again and credits much of her success to him.

“Of course playing for Glen was a factor. I would not be where I am today without him and the respect I have for him and the rest of the coaching staff there,” Petersen said. “It is a huge reason why I committed and why it was such an easy decision. I am extremely excited to play for him again.”

Petersen hopes the smaller school will give her a chance to play right away and would like to be a part of a winning program while at Mount Mercy.

Petersen will be joined at Mount Mercy by Burgart, a long-time teammate and close friend. Burgart committed to the Mustangs a week ago and will go back to catcher when she goes to college. She will receive a partial scholarship.

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Burgart, who was second team all-Metro last year, chose Mount Mercy to play with Petersen. Although excited to be at the same school, Burgart said she really liked the coaching staff and the school's nursing programs.

Petersen and Burgart are both excited to be staying together for four more years.

"It has always been me and Carson's dream to go to college together and play softball so the fact that it has become a reality is awesome," Petersen said. "I feel incredibly lucky."

"We always dreamed of playing together in college," Burgart added.

Sedlacek gave a verbal commitment to play at UNI on Aug. 14. She will make it official on Nov. 9 when she signs her national letter of intent.

Sedlacek, a power hitting outfielder, turned down offers from Mount Mercy and Coe for a chance to play Division I ball at UNI, where she will get a partial scholarship. She had interest from several other Division III schools, and Kirkwood and Iowa Central junior colleges.

In the end it came to what UNI offered that the others could not. Sedlacek enjoyed her tour of the UNI campus and facilities. The coaches were very accommodating and made a strong pitch for Sedlacek to join their program.

"I liked the facilities they had," Sedlacek said. "The coaches were also fun and factored into my decision."

UNI is coached by former Cedar Rapids Regis prep Ryan Jacobs, who is beginning his sixth season as the Panthers' head coach.

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Sedlacek did not play until her sophomore year at Jefferson but quickly made a name for herself earning second team all-Metro and MVC honors that year. Last year, she led the J-Hawks in hitting and was named to the first team all-metro, all-conference and all-state teams.

Sedlacek is excited to have come so far and to be in a position to continue playing softball at the next level.

“Yeah, but I never thought I actually would,” Sedlacek said, when asked if getting to play college ball was a goal.

Sedlacek originally wanted to take her time in making her college decision, but when UNI told her they needed a decision in a month she thought about it and felt good about her choice to continue her athletic career there. She is now excited to learn from a new coach while playing at a very high level.