

Kiah Stokes chooses UConn

Written by Jim Ecker

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MARION — Kiah Stokes is headed for the mecca of women's college basketball.

Stokes, the 6-foot-3 senior center for the Linn-Mar Lions, announced Thursday afternoon at a press conference that she's accepted a scholarship to play basketball at the University of Connecticut next year.

Stokes visited Connecticut, Iowa, Tennessee, Georgia and Maryland before making her decision. She said the process was exciting, overwhelming and stressful at times. The Huskies, coached by Geno Auriemma, have won the last two NCAA titles and have won seven national championships since 1995.

"I feel like a weight has been lifted off my shoulders," she said. "It was fun at first, because it's nice to get attention. But after awhile you just kind of get sick of it."

Stokes said the Iowa Hawkeyes were her second choice. "Good old hometown Iowa," she said.

Kiah's father, Greg, was a star basketball player at Iowa from 1981-85, and her brother, Darius, is currently a member of the UI men's basketball team.

Greg Stokes said his daughter received about 70 offers from Division I programs.

"I'm very excited for her," he said. "I know she'll be fine. I do. It's just a terrific opportunity for her.

"Coach Auriemma really loves her body type and athleticism," he said. "And he anticipates using her ... running the floor, blocking shots and playing an up-tempo style of basketball."

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Stokes averaged 19.5 points, 13 rebounds and 5 blocked shots last season when she led Linn-Mar to the Class 4A state title with a 26-0 record. She collected 20 points, 18 rebounds and 6 blocks when the Lions beat Des Moines East, 38-35, in the finals.

Stokes held the press conference in the foyer outside the Linn-Mar gym, with the 2010 state championship trophy by her side. She was joined by her father and mother, Julie Saddler.

Auriemma is known as a demanding coach, but Stokes did not sound concerned. "I think I'll handle it okay," she said. "He knows how to get the best out of each individual person."

Connecticut has a strong tradition of sending its graduates to the WNBA for pro basketball, and Stokes said that fact played a role in her decision.

Stokes plans to enroll at Connecticut for summer school and participate in summer conditioning at the college in Storrs, Conn.

She thinks she might be able to play for the Huskies next season as a freshman.

"If I work hard, there is a chance that I could play as a freshman," she said. "But it definitely will take a lot of hard work, and I know that."

Stokes, who weighs 180 pounds, said she needs to get stronger for the next step in her career.

"College girls can push you around a little bit," she said.