

Precocious frosh raises Hawks' hopes

Written by Sher Jasperse

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While the girls state basketball tournament officially closed the books on the prep careers of several outstanding Mississippi Valley Conference seniors, the Metro's top young player eyed the tourney from a distance, dreaming of writing her own chapters in future contests.

Prairie's Madison Dellamuth, a starting point guard who was the only freshman selected to the MVC first team, attended the Cedar Rapids Washington-Pleasant Valley substate game just to get a feel for the competitive environment.

"Even watching the Washington game, I know we can be there," she says of her team, which finished 4-18 overall and 3-13 in the MVC this season. "It was kind of hard because I think as a team we could be out there and we could compete with those teams."

A quiet kid who speaks about playing basketball with an unmistakable smolder in her eye, she's less boastful than determined, believing she can help her Prairie Hawks achieve the kind of success she experienced as a youngster.

Dellamuth began playing basketball on 'Y' teams in first grade, but mostly just liked being outdoors at the time, she says. "We lived out in the country, so I was off doing things – riding four-wheelers, swimming, playing football with my brothers, because that's all I have is brothers."

Credit her brothers – Austin, a junior at Prairie, and Mitch, her twin – with helping her develop the strength and agility that have made her a powerful force on the court.

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Her parents, Mark Dellamuth and Jackie Fett, encouraged her in anything she wanted to do, she says. "They were farm kids. My mom played basketball in high school, and my dad just likes to watch me excel at anything."

Like many top area preps, she developed her skills playing on an AAU team – the Lady Lightning – from third through eighth grades. Dellamuth made great friends, learned fundamentals, and got loads of game experience under the auspices of coach Marv Meier.

The Lady Lightning also won numerous state titles, so playing on a team with a losing record is a new experience for Dellamuth. "Being on this team is a lot different," she says. "It helps me – not to accept losing, but to see how much you can learn from it."

She's convinced her team made important strides over the course of the season.

"We got better as the year went by," she says. "Coming into the season we didn't really know each other, and we had played different kinds of games. We really know each other now. If we work together in the summer, I think we can do a lot better."

Prairie Coach Steve Doser agrees. "We grew a lot from last year," he says. "Statistically, we were up in every category. We set a school record for 3-pointers, and we made a lot of improvements in shooting percentage, rebounds, steals and assists."

Dellamuth was a huge factor, leading her team in scoring (9.7 ppg), field goal percentage (39%), 3-point shooting percentage (38%), free throw percentage (69%), and, most notably, assists, dishing 73 to her teammates to place fourth in the conference and second in the Metro behind Linn-Mar senior Kailee Karr.

In spite of her dominance, she was hardly satisfied. "I honestly don't think I had the best season," she says. "I hoped I would do better, but I learned a lot and it's going to help me in the years to come. I need to get better at relaxing and letting the game come to me."

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That's vintage Dellamuth, her coach says. "She's her own worst critic, and that's both a positive and a negative. She will come out of a game and find 10 things that she did wrong."

Doser encourages her to stay positive, but never has to motivate her.

"She's very focused and she has that competitive drive on every single possession and every minute of the game. The thing we're working on with her is we can't get her to shoot a lot."

He'd like to see her score twice as many points, even as she manages the game with a maturity and touch that belie her age.

"She's so unselfish. She's one of the best distributors of the basketball – boys or girls – that I've ever seen," says Doser.

"When she gets the ball up the floor it's like a rope. Her court visibility is incredible, and her ability to get the ball to a player is uncanny."

Dellamuth lists at a wiry 5-foot-6. "But I think I grew a little this past month," she says – as ninth graders are prone to do.

With Dellamuth running the offense, Doser has high hopes for his young team.

"She'll have some good surrounding cast who will grow with her," he says. "She's a true point guard – a scoring point guard and a distributing point guard all in one, and she's probably the best on-ball defender I've coached in 17 years."

In other words, stay tuned. This one could be a page turner in the next couple of years.