

Belz will pitch for UNI softball

Written by Jim Ecker

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Samantha Belz was interested in attending the University of Northern Iowa when she was a high school student at Davenport West, but it didn't work out then.

Now it has.

Belz, currently a sophomore at Kirkwood Community College, signed a national letter-of-intent Wednesday to join the UNI softball program for the 2014-15 school year.

"It feels good, knowing where I'm going and that I'm going to a good program," she said.

Belz compiled a flashy 20-1 record with a 0.96 ERA last season as a freshman for Kirkwood, helping the Eagles go 57-5 and reach the semifinals of the NJCAA Division II national tournament.

Belz took an official visit to Northern Iowa last Friday and knew it was the place for her.

"When I went there I just felt at home," she said. "I already felt like I was part of the family. The environment and the team structure are very important to me, because I'm a very close person with my family.

"Knowing that my team will be my second family and knowing they will be there for me is very important to me. I just felt that right away when I went on my visit. They offered me the day I went up there and I made my decision on the way home. I just felt UNI was where I was supposed to be."

Northern Iowa softball coach Ryan Jacobs is from Cedar Rapids and was a star baseball player at Regis High School and Kirkwood in the 1990's. Kirkwood softball coach Joe Yegge has close ties with the UNI coaching staff and is delighted Belz will be heading their way.

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"I think it's a great accomplishment for her," he said. "She's worked her tail off to get there."

Belz was Kirkwood's No.2 pitcher last season behind All-American Amber Logemann, but Logemann left after her freshman year with the Eagles to pitch at Miami of Ohio in the Mid-American Conference. Belz welcomes the opportunity to be the ace of the staff.

"It puts more pressure on me, but I can handle the pressure," she said.

Belz struck out 86 batters in 123.2 innings last season. She displayed good control, walking only 17.

"She's going to keep the ball low, she's going to have good velocity," Yegge remarked. "She's coming up with a good off-speed pitch this fall. Her strength is getting ground balls."