

Harlan County Sports: Basketball: Davenport hoping to close hoops career with a regional title



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By JOHN HENSON

Harlan County Schools

Even though it seems as if she's been playing forever, Miranda Davenport knows her days as a high school basketball player are almost over.

Named the Kentucky Association of Basketball Coaches player of the year for the 13th Region earlier this week, Davenport is the middle of the most important week in her long and distinguished high school career as she tries to lead the Harlan County Lady Bears to their first 13th Region championship.

The senior guard scored 20 points Monday as the Lady Bears opened the tournament with a 60-30 win over Barbourville. Harlan County will be the favorite Friday in a semifinal matchup against North Laurel, and a win would likely set up a showdown against Clay County on Saturday in the regional finals. Clay defeated HCHS in the regional finals in both 2009 and 2010, the first two years after the school opened following the merger of James A. Cawood, Cumberland and Evarts high schools.

High school basketball in Harlan County was much different when Davenport was a sixth-grade phenom who moved up to the high school program at James A. Cawood. She earned a starting job as an eighth grader and is the answer to multiple trivia questions in Harlan County basketball history as the last high school athlete still playing who started a game at Cawood, Evarts or Cumberland high schools before the merger.

"It's different, but I think it's awesome I got to do all that," she said. "I would never have thought I'd end up at a school like this. I played in all those Class A schools back then. I love it here, and I'm glad I made this choice. It gives you a different feeling — a college feeling, I guess."

Davenport got an early start in basketball at 6 when her father asked if she wanted to guard her younger brother, Chad Massingill, now a junior guard for the HCHS boys basketball team.

"My dad asked me if I wanted to play defense on him, and I did," she said. "He let me start playing Little League and it started from there."

Her father, Jimmy, had the biggest influence on her basketball career, Davenport said.

"I love basketball. I always have," she said.

High expectations followed Davenport throughout her basketball career, beginning in elementary school.

"I always like for the weight to be on my shoulders. I feel if I do good everyone else around me will do good," she said.

Davenport appeared to be in position to earn a starting job at Harlan County when the school opened in the fall of 2008, but she eventually transferred to Harlan and had an impressive freshman season with the Lady Dragons. She came back to Harlan County the next year but had to sit out most of the season before being ruled eligible by the Kentucky High School Athletic Association. The time away from competitive basketball took its toll on Davenport, and her scoring average dropped as a junior.

"I tried to practice and stay up with it, but it's not the same as playing in games," she said. "I felt where I sat out a year and I was new I felt they were already established."

Davenport is back to her old self as a senior as she moved from wing back to point guard and took over leadership of the team.

"I knew I was a senior and it was my last year," Davenport said. "It was like a new start to me with all the seniors graduating. I knew I had to be a leader."

Harlan County lacked consistency through the first half of the season but has played much better of late, taking a 10-game winning streak into Friday's 13th Region semifinals against North Laurel.

Davenport has been a leader in the Lady Bears' surge, averaging a team-high 16 points and handling the ball the majority of the time while often drawing the most difficult assignment on defense

"Miranda has been a consistent threat all year, not only offensively but defensively as well," Harlan County coach Anthony Nolan said. "Her defense is something that is often overlooked. More importantly, Miranda is one of the most competitive players I have ever coached. She has a great determination to win

and compete. Her leadership on the court has been a huge advantage in most games, and she provides motivation for the younger players in her work ethic every day.”

Davenport and forward Kalee Carroll, the only other senior on the roster, have drawn praise from Nolan for their leadership.

“We try to encourage them,” Davenport said. “I think our defense has been good. It has helped our offense.”

Another reason the season has been special for Davenport is being able to play with her younger sister. Brooklyn Massingill earned a starting job with the Lady Bears as an eighth grader after a big season at Evarts Elementary School.

“I love it. I feel she takes the pressure off me. If they are double teaming me, I know she will hit the shot,” Davenport said. “A lot of sisters argue, but I love playing with her. I think it helps her, too. I try to create shots for her, and she will get me the ball when I’m open.”

Harlan County (25-6), which defeated North Laurel 69-52 on Feb. 11, could be headed toward a third matchup in four years against Clay County (28-5) in the regional finals. Clay won 41-37 over the Lady Bears on Jan. 7 in Manchester.

“It will take a lot of heart and defense and blocking out,” Davenport said of the keys to winning a regional title. “I know our guards can stop their guards. Our posts did a good job last time.”

Davenport has talked with coaches at Georgetown, Berea and Lincoln Memorial University and plans to continue her basketball career in college. Davenport could draw even more attention from colleges by making it to the state tournament and having a strong showing with the Kentucky All Stars.

As the region’s player of the year, Davenport will receive an invitation to try out for the Kentucky All Star team. The state’s top seniors play in a two-game series every year against the Indiana All-Stars. Davenport was also selected to participate in the East-West All-Star game on March 10 at Warren Central High School in Bowling Green.

“It’s a huge honor and one that I definitely feel she deserves,” Nolan said.

“It’s a big honor,” Davenport said. “I’m very excited about it.”

The East-West All-Star game will be played at 3:15 CST, between the state semifinals and finals at Western Kentucky University.