

TALL ASPIRATIONS

MASTIC BEACH'S D'AMICO HEADED TO NOTRE DAME

BY JOSHUA CASPER

You cannot teach height. But combine towering stature with the willingness to learn and success in basketball is inevitable. Standing 6-foot-4, Mastic Beach's Melissa D'Amico is willing, and most certainly able. Next year, she will be bringing her adept post game and paint presence to hallowed Notre Dame.

"We believe we have found a real rising star in Melissa," says Fighting Irish head coach Muffet McGraw, who has led the Irish to eight straight NCAA tournaments, two trips to the Final Four and the 2001 NCAA title. "She is so multidimensional. She's someone who will be a great addition to our team at both ends of the floor."

Interestingly, Melissa might very well have never seen the hardwood, if not for her height.

"I never really liked basketball when I was younger," D'Amico recalls. "I used to do everything—hockey, soccer, softball, volley-

ball, tennis—I got into basketball and realized that it was for me, and I dropped everything else. I tried it and loved it."

The rest is history. Melissa's affinity for basketball has paid big dividends. Last year, she averaged 16.8 points, 9.1 rebounds and 3.5 blocks for William Floyd High School.

"Melissa is a born leader. She's always been a team leader, off the court too," says teammate Brittany Jackolski. "She has made me a better person on and off the court."

Last summer, Melissa was invited to travel to China, along with other top high school talent, where she played against professional Chinese teams.

"It was amazing," she recalls. "We played a lot of great talent—professionals who've been playing for their whole lives. We saw the Great Wall and Tiananmen Square...it was incredible."

Also recruited by Big East powerhouses



D'Amico and friend get their Irish up

St. John's, Boston College, Syracuse and West Virginia, D'Amico says the family atmosphere and tradition at Notre Dame was the deciding factor. Now, she hopes to follow in the footsteps of Notre Dame graduate and WNBA Detroit Shock star Ruth Riley, the first women's basketball player ever to earn finals MVP honors at both the college and professional levels, winning a National Championship in 2001 and the WNBA title last year.

"[Riley] is my favorite player, and her post coach [Carol Owens] is one of the best in the nation, and really helped Ruth," D'Amico explains, adding, "I'm definitely blessed that I'm in this position and have this opportunity. If I have a chance to be drafted in the WNBA or play overseas down the road, I would love to do that too." ❊