

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Dayton a haven of family, basketball for women's team

STEVE MILLER
Sports Editor

If you look up "Dayton" online, you'll likely come across cursory information about a small Ohio city built on the hard work of several industrialist families, but nothing otherwise noteworthy. These seemingly unassuming characteristics, though, are exactly what the UD women's basketball program holds near and dear, from the legacy of its former players to today's stars.

Dayton, to the players and coaches, is a local destination where personal values and athletic performance mingle into an appealing oasis, running deep with both family values and basketball success. To many Flyers, UD was not the most prestigious basketball school that recruited them. But it was the one with which they most identified.

"Heart, hustle, grit, togetherness, toughness," Lauren Cannatelli listed the qualities that make Flyer basketball what it is.

Cannatelli, a junior guard and one of the team's leading scorers, is a Cincinnati native and a graduate of Lakota West High School. She represents a new crop of Dayton standouts who share similar family values to the Flyers of old.

"When I was being recruited by Coach Jibir and Coach Green...I just really loved [how they portrayed] this family atmosphere," said Cannatelli. "And that's what really enticed me to come here."

Jim Jibir, who was head coach at the time, and then-assistant Shauna Green led the Flyers on a 2015 run to the Elite Eight, which happened to be Cannatelli's senior year of high school. Cannatelli's excitement, understandably, was furthered by this success.

But what's most notable is that the success of 2015, and seasons since, was built on local, determined players with aspirations not unlike Cannatelli's: a close community with good basketball.

"If you look back, the Ally Malott's and Andrea Hoover's and Justine Raterman's, Cassie Sant's and Jenna Burdette's, they've all wanted that family atmosphere," explained now-Head Coach Shauna Green in a recent interview. "That

smaller, tight-knit culture that we have here."

And that makes sense if you look at each player's roots.

Raterman, who graduated in 2012 and is Dayton's fifth all-time leading scorer, hails from Versailles, OH, with a population less than 3,000.

Sant is from Kettering, and was one of the team's top scorers during her senior year in 2014.

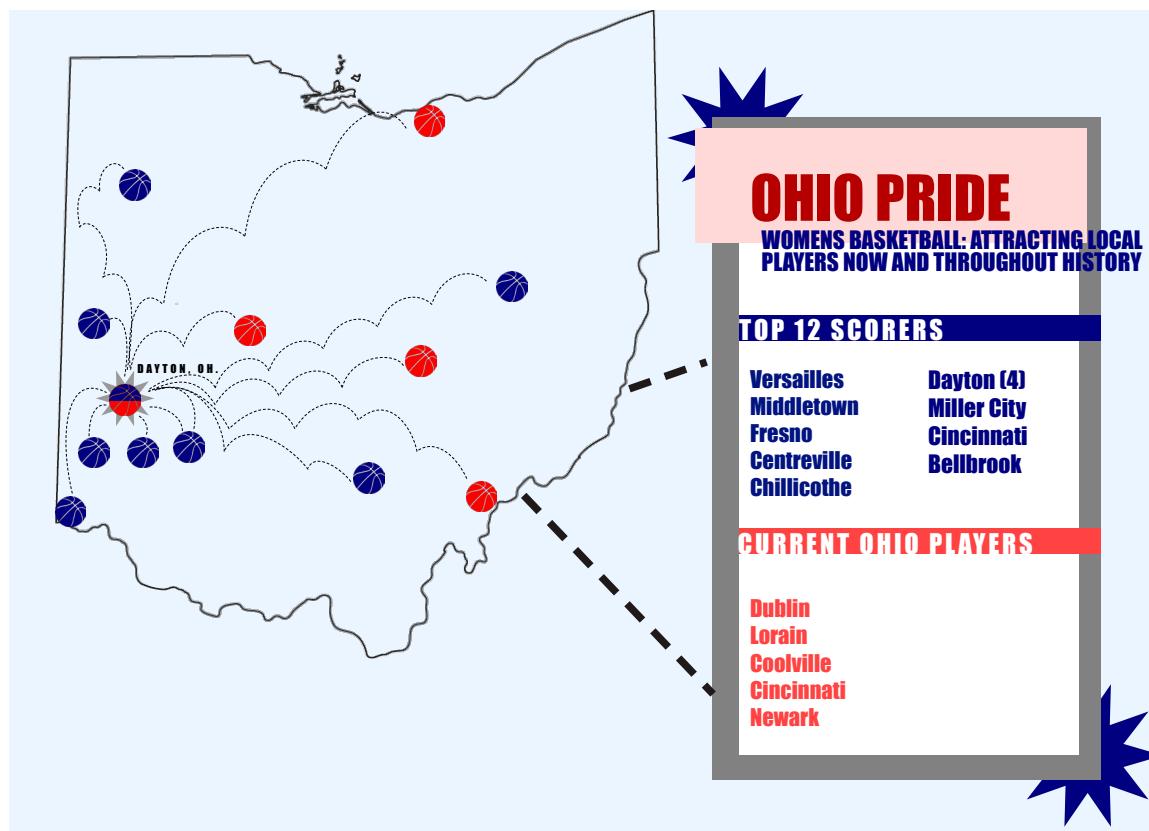
was nice to get to know because Ally is 30 minutes away and Hoover is 10. They told me about how their family comes all the time so that's just really important."

Though Malott and Hoover were both nationally-renowned players--both were drafted to the WNBA in 2015--they remained close to their families throughout their entire collegiate careers, much like the stars on today's team.

away from Notre Dame's program and big-time programs like that she was recruited by, there's some good recruiting, [and] there's some luck."

But the bottomline was that Malott's recruitment, like many others', came down to both the team and the player attaining what they desired.

"She wanted that culture. She wanted to be close to her family.



Above: The top 12 scorers from UD women's basketball history all hail from Ohio. This year's team also has five Buckeye natives including Cannatelli and Burdette, Christine Szabo (Dublin), Alex Harris (Lorain) and Ashleigh Parkinson (Newark). Graphic by Ria Gordon.

And Malott and Hoover, who composed arguably the strongest class in the program's history, are from Middletown and Bellbrook, respectively. They were the driving forces behind the 2015 run, which happened to be Jenna Burdette's freshman season.

Burdette is from Coolville, Ohio, and was thrust into the starting point guard role as a freshman, playing in a home arena five times more populous than her hometown. But she learned quickly under the tutelage of the same players who had helped attract her to Dayton in the first place.

"For my official visit, I got to room with Ally Malott and Andrea [Hoover]," Burdette said. "They're both also local people, and so that

"[Malott's] parents were at every game. Hoover's parents were at every game. Jenna's parents are at every game. Lauren's parents are at every game," Green said. "If you look at this program, a lot of the success has been based off of Ohio kids that wanted to stay close to home and family was important to them."

While it's an obvious win-win to attract players from the local area, UD has also been extremely fortunate with the quality of high school players available within a relatively small radius.

"That year we had Andrea Hoover and Ally Malott, there's some luck to that," Green said. "Ally was a high school All-American, and to be able to get her

That's what was important to her," Green said.

As is true with the program's past, so is with its future.

"The 2018 class that we already have signed, it's all Ohio kids," Green explained. "You have one from Columbus area, one from Chillicothe, and one from Pickerton Central [in the] Columbus area. So all close, local kids who grew up knowing about Dayton and knowing the history and wanting to be a part of it and that family atmosphere."

But what makes Dayton a cut above as a locale of hoops and family is that the city has embraced them these players as well.

Long regarded as a basketball town--UD Arena has hosted the

most NCAA Tournament games of any venue in the nation--the city of Dayton provides the Flyer women's basketball team the highest attendance in the Atlantic 10--by far.

In the 2016-17 season, UD averaged 2,674 fans at each women's game, crushing the conference average of 920.

"We definitely lead the league in attendance for sure," said Burdette. "It's cool to compare us and the other [A-10] schools because there's literally no one [there] and it just shows how big basketball is in the Dayton area."

Even before the 2015 Elite Eight season, Dayton averaged a few thousand fans at each game. But now that the team has played in seven of the last eight NCAA Tournaments, there's more reason than ever to show up to UD Arena.

And that success, past and present, remains the hallmark of this program.

"Going back to the legacy that was set before, that's who we want to be," said Cannatelli. "We want to play in the way that the Andrea Hoover's and Ally Malott's and those players created for us."

"I think you have to go back and you have to give credit to the players that had established it and really built it up," praised Green. "And now it's just about continuing and even taking it to another level."

Like the city's gritty innovators and businessmen of the 20th Century, the UD players fight tirelessly for their own goals.

"Just putting Dayton on the map," Burdette said, explaining what her success as a Flyer means personally.

But whether or not it's "on the map," the name of the city and school for which the team plays serves as a constant reminder of the performance expected.

Cannatelli divulged a halftime conversation of a recent game. "We literally said 'We're not playing Dayton basketball'...we need to get back to playing Dayton basketball."

How that happens remains a secret behind the success, be it with "heart, hustle, grit," as Cannatelli proposed, or the one thing that holds it all together: Family.