

Brooks heading south to play college lacrosse

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FITCHBURG -- Fitchburg senior Larissa Brooks was looking for a college in a warmer climate that would give her the opportunity to play women's lacrosse, the sport she loves the most.

Brooks made the next step in her career official on Wednesday afternoon when she signed her National Letter of Intent to play lacrosse at Division II Catawba College at a small ceremony with administrators, family, teammates and coaches in the Fitchburg High School library.

In addition to Catawba, Brooks also considered Division II Barton College and Division III Rivier University. Those schools expressed athletic interest, but she also had a number of schools for academics only that she was considering.

Located in Salisbury, N.C., Catawba competes in the South Atlantic Conference. It is a small campus with roughly 1,300 students.

Brooks received academic scholarships in addition to her athletic funding, which played a role in the decision.

"Financing was a big part of the decision," Brooks said. "I don't think I would be able to go if I didn't get the scholarships that I did. The campus was a big factor. I loved it. Everyone was super nice and the weather was nice there as well."

The Brooks family recently took a trip down to the campus and because of the school's climate, Brooks will be able to play lacrosse year-round.

Another factor was the option to double major in English and Political Science, and with the Catawba campus located near many law schools, Brooks noted it is a good opportunity for not only her undergraduate experience, but also a post-graduate move to law school.

The Indians' program has had recent success in women's lacrosse. The program currently at 10-4, winners of eight of its last 10 games.

"It's historically a strong program," Brooks said. "They're getting ready for their championship tournament in the upcoming weeks and they have really great coaches. I witnessed a practice while I was down there and saw a game the day after, and the thing that stuck out to me the most is how focused they were. They had fun leading up to their workouts, but hit game mode immediately."

Brooks projects as a midfielder in college and several departing seniors this year at the position, there is a strong likelihood she could see time early on.

Brooks played youth lacrosse in the North Middlesex program and then attended St. Bernard's -- playing softball as a freshman. After transferring to Fitchburg as a sophomore, she rekindled her lacrosse passion and has been a Red Raider ever since.

Brooks has shined both on and off the field. She holds a 3.64 grade point average, which ranks in the top 15 percent of her class.

The senior is a member of the National Honors Society, a student council member, a peer leadership club member, a part of the school improvement council and on the student athlete leadership council. Brooks is also an MIAA student ambassador and a Girls' State participant.

Brooks participated in three sports at FHS, including three years of varsity field hockey. Local Division III colleges expressed interest in the opportunity of Brooks playing field hockey, but she preferred to pursue lacrosse.

"(Brooks) is the heart and soul of the team, and helps all of the younger players around her," Fitchburg girls' lacrosse head coach Becca Fluet said. "She's very, very good at lacrosse and has helped me as a newer coach to ease into the sport. She knows the answers to any lacrosse questions, and I'm very proud of her to be going to a school to play lacrosse."

There wasn't much of a drop off taking a year off from the sport as a freshman and Brooks continues to show improvement from a technical standpoint as she grew in the program.

"From last year to this year she has definitely improved," said Fluet, who is in her second year with the program. "She's been learning new moves and working hard to get ready to play at the Division II level."

Brooks is quick to credit her parents and coaches for providing her the opportunities to achieve success both on and off the field.

"My parents have been instrumental in my success," Brooks said. "They put me through cross training, camps and travel during the summer. The coaches here and my teammates have always been encouraging."

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