

Harnden will make a splash at UMass

By Sean Sweeney, Correspondent
Sentinel & Enterprise

Updated: 2017-11-09 04:53:03.778722

FITCHBURG -- Even though she never participated in interscholastic sports during her time on Arn-How Road, Fitchburg High pulled out all the stops for senior swimmer Brianna Harnden on Wednesday.

With parents Keith and Regina, siblings Tim and Kaitlyn, as well as her coach Don Lemieux and Fitchburg High principal Jeremy Roche smiling next to her, Harnden put pen to paper as she signed her National Letter of Intent to swim for Division 1 University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

Along with UMass, Harnden is expected to be dually-enrolled in the Commonwealth Honors College, where she will study biomedical engineering.

"I'm very excited to get it out of the way," Harnden said during the ceremony in the Dr. Philip M. Fallon Auditorium. "I knew I wanted to go to a school with a good science program, and UMass has a highly reputable science program; they just renovated their life sciences building. It's brand new, state-of-the-art, it's just up and running as of this year. That gives me good research opportunities, and good classes to be in.

"I also knew I wanted to swim Division 1. The team was really welcoming and friendly, and I already felt I was a part of the team. My times in my three events would be in the top 16 in the Atlantic 10, which scores points: I wanted to be part of a team that I can contribute to, but still be challenged and competitive on. When I was at UMass, everything clicked; everything felt right there."

Harnden also looked at George Washington, Georgetown, the University of Vermont, Bucknell, Northeastern, and Dartmouth College.

While Fitchburg co-ops with Leominster in the pool, Harnden's prior commitments to the Greenwood Swimming Club prohibited her from training and competing with the interscholastic program.

In addition, Greenwood's program is year-round; the Fitchburg-Leominster co-op runs alongside the MIAA's winter season calendar.

"I wanted to represent Fitchburg athletics, so I think with it being a co-op and technically representing Leominster makes it less of a regret," she said. "I'd be wearing all blue; in the grand scheme of things, it would have affected my Greenwood training, so I knew it wasn't worth it.

"It was kind of hard not being able to do the school sports and the typical high school athletics; that's what all my friends do. But I don't have any regrets; I loved training with Greenwood and I have good friends on that team."

Harnden began swimming under Lemieux's tutelage since her seventh-grade year. Lemieux, the former Gardner High swimming coach, noted that if Harnden had swum in the co-op, she would have been a state champion, "no doubt about it."

At Greenwood, where she primarily swims the 200-meter butterfly, 100-meter butterfly, and the 200-meter freestyle, Harnden qualified for the International Swim Coaches Association's Junior National

Championships during in eighth-grade and was also the New England champion in the 800-meter freestyle relay in 2015.

Harnden has placed in the top eight in the ISCA Junior Nationals three times, and has been recognized as a top-10 swimmer in New England the last five years.

In her academics, Harnden is one of the top students in the Class of 2018: her 4.37 grade point average is good enough for fifth in the 298-student class, and she's a member of not only the school's Honors Academy, but the National Honor Society, as well.

"I've known Brie since her freshman year; she became a member of the Student Advisory Council," Roche said. "I got a sense about her and what she is about as a person. I always knew her from that perspective, as a student, a student involved in the school, someone who's trying to make the school a better place. And she is in the Honors Academy, which requires multiple AP classes, honors-level across the board.

"She's an unbelievable everything: student, athlete, person. Top of the line."

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