

Daniels, 14, shows her stuff in GTL

Written by Jim Ecker

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NORTH LIBERTY - Caitlynn Daniels is only 14 years old, but she's already playing basketball against college girls in the Game Time League and loving every minute of it.

Daniels will be a freshman at Xavier this year and it's probably a good idea to remember her name. She's already received a recruiting letter from Iowa Coach Lisa Bluder and many more are sure to follow.

Daniels made her debut in the Game Time League Wednesday night in a game that featured three Iowa Hawkeyes at the North Liberty Recreation Center. If you didn't know Daniels just graduated from Regis Middle School last month, you would have guessed she was much older and perhaps a college kid herself.

"I thought she held her own," said Maggie O'Connell, an assistant coach at Xavier who is also her head coach in the Game Time League. "Obviously her conditioning helped her in that respect. She hardly turned the ball over and played pretty solid defense. Good for her."

Daniels, who is a natural point guard with excellent ballhandling skills, played most of the game at a wing position, but O'Connell moved her to the point in the fourth quarter and Daniels showed what she could do with her passing and leadership.

"I was a little nervous at first, but once the game got going it wasn't that scary," she said.

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Daniels took only two shots and missed them both, but she collected two assists and two rebounds and made an important contribution as her McCurry's/Vinton Merchants nipped L.L. Pelling, 86-85, on a 3-pointer by Iowa's Alexis Sevillian at the buzzer.

Sevillian led the winners with 28 points. Hannah Stewart, another Hawkeye, tossed in 24 points. Cassidy Clark, who played at Kirkwood, added 20 points to the victory. Megan Gustafson of Iowa led all scorers with 37 points for L.L. Pelling.



There are 12 Iowa Hawkeyes in the Game Time League this summer, along with players from 13 other colleges. Daniels, who is one of 12 high school players in the league, did not know what the GTL was all about when she was invited to apply for the draft last month.

Draft? What draft, she wondered. Now she's a 14-year-old kid playing against girls who are 20, 21 and 22. Best of all, she's holding her own and not intimidated.

"I didn't really know what it was at first until my Dad told me, so I think it's kind of a big deal," she acknowledged. "It's going to be fun. I've played up before, but never with college-level players."

Daniels noticed a big difference once she entered the game in the first quarter.

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"Definitely the pace," she said. "And they're a lot stronger and bigger."

Marcus Paige played in the Prime Time League (the men's equivalent to the GTL) prior to his freshman year at Linn-Mar High School in 2008. He went on to have an outstanding career at Linn-Mar and North Carolina and now is trying to stick in the NBA.

It's impossible to predict what the future will hold for Daniels, but competing in the Game Time League is a big step in the right direction.

"It's definitely going to get me better, probably on defense, because I have to move my feet a lot more," she said. "You can't reach as much."

O'Connell helped get Daniels into the league. She knew the league needed more players and asked Xavier Coach Tom Lilly if he could recommend someone from his program. Lilly recommended Daniels and then O'Connell picked her in the draft.

"She's got a good attitude, she gets them down the court," said O'Connell. "She's in playing shape right now in the summer, which is a benefit, because not a lot of people are getting in the gym."

Lilly plans to put Daniels on the varsity this season.

"She'll definitely help us at the point guard position with her scoring and ballhandling," said O'Connell. "She's good at recognizing and seeing her teammates and communicating that and getting the ball to them."

"That will help her, and her good attitude and coach-ability will take her a long way as well."

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O'Connell thinks playing in the GTL will help Daniels develop as a player.

"I think her confidence will be growing all summer, showing she can hold her own against the Hawks and all these college players in the area and even against older high school kids," she said.

Daniels is also an accomplished soccer player and has been busy this summer, traveling to basketball and soccer events. She's already been to Louisville, Chicago, St. Louis, Lincoln (Neb.), Des Moines, Rockford (Ill.) and Muscatine, with a trip to Kansas City on the horizon.

"I like it," she said. "It keeps me busy."