

Stokes celebrates 18th birthday in Star game

Written by Jim Ecker

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CHICAGO -- Kiah Stokes received some really nice presents for her 18th birthday in Chicago Wednesday.

She got several new pairs of Reeboks, a jersey with 'Stokes' written on the back and a warmup suit that said 'McDonald's All-American' in bold letters.

Actually, everybody who played in the 10th annual McDonald's All-American Game at the United Center got the same presents. It just happened to be her birthday.

"We got a lot," Stokes said after the contest. "We got three pairs of shoes, three new sweatsuits, four T-shirts, a couple of Polos, a hat, shorts. We got a lot of stuff."

Stokes rubbed elbows with 23 of the best high school players in the country Wednesday night. She made the starting lineup for the West team and grabbed five rebounds, but the 6-foot-3 senior from Linn-Mar was not happy with her performance.

She scored one point in 16 minutes and her West team lost to the East squad, 78-66.

"Yeah, I'm disappointed," she said. "I missed easy shots. I had stupid turnovers, I wasn't as aggressive as I should have been. We got our butt kicked, I know that."

"But in the end, it was fun to be here," she said. "I'll try to redeem myself in the game on

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Saturday."

Stokes will continue her postseason tour Saturday in Indianapolis at the 2011 WBCA High School All-America Game at Conseco Fieldhouse, then she'll become a basketball fan at the Final Four of the NCAA women's basketball tournament in Indianapolis.

Stokes has signed with the University of Connecticut, and by happy coincidence the Huskies will play Notre Dame in the semifinals Sunday night at Conseco Fieldhouse. The finals will be played Tuesday night at Conseco.



"I'm going to stay and watch UConn play Sunday night, and then I'm staying for the championship game," she said. "My mom has tickets. Whoever's in the championship game, I'm going to watch them. Hopefully it's UConn."

Stokes compiled gaudy numbers during her career at Linn-Mar and was named Iowa Miss Basketball this season after averaging 25 points, 14.5 rebounds and 5.6 blocked shots. She found things a lot tougher in the McDonald's game, where both teams had a half-dozen girls who all stood 6-foot-2 or taller.

She was officially 0-for-2 from the field, but the stat crew may have missed a couple of attempts, including two that appeared to be blocked. She wasn't charged with any turnovers, but several possible rebounds were stripped from her arms.

Stokes knows the transition from high school to college basketball will be demanding, as shown

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Wednesday night.

"It's going to be tough," she said. "I already knew that. I definitely need work, but that's what practice is for. And that's why I'm going to such a great school, because they're going to push me to be what I want to be."

Connecticut is the two-time defending NCAA champion, and two of Stokes' future teammates also played in the McDonald's All-American game. Brianna Banks, a 5-9 guard from Georgia, led the West team with 17 points, and Kaleena Mosqueda-Lewis, a 6-foot forward from California, chipped in 12 points.

"I think both of those girls are cool," said Stokes. "They're amazing, both on and off the court, so it will be great to room with one of them (at UConn)."

Stokes and Banks took their official visits to Connecticut at the same time, then got to spend time together in Chicago this week.

"She's a great person," said Banks. "She's always smiling. She's a real good person to hang out with."

"She has a lot of work to do in the post, but we'll get there," said Banks. "Get a little stronger, get in the weight room. We all need to get in the weight room. We'll all be OK."

Banks scored 17 points in 16 minutes, hitting 7 of 12 shots from the field and three free throws. "I'm glad she's going to UConn with me, I can tell you that," said Stokes.

Stokes won't have much of a summer vacation this year. She said school ends at Linn-Mar on May 29, and she plans to report to Connecticut on May 30 for summer school. She said she'll try out for a USA Team that's scheduled to play in Chile this summer and will accompany UConn on a European trip in August.

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She recently returned from a trip to the Dominican Republic during spring break, but that was not for basketball.

"When I was a freshman (in high school), I never could have imagined going all across the world to play basketball," she said. "And now that it's happening, you just have to take it day by day.

"It's an amazing experience and I wouldn't trade it for anything. I love it, and I want to travel around the world to play basketball as long as I can."

Elizabeth Williams, a 6-foot-3 center who is going to Duke, led the East with 23 points and 11 rebounds in 19 minutes. Samantha Logic, a 6-foot guard from Racine, Wis. who has signed with Iowa, collected four points, four rebounds and two assists for the East.

Dr. Anthony Pappas, the head coach at Waterloo West High School, was an assistant coach for the East team.

WEST (66): Kaleena Mosqueda-Lewis 3 4-4 12, Kiah Stokes 0 1-2 1, Krystal Forthan 1 2-2 4, Amber Orrange 3 0-0 7, Ariya Crook-Williams 1 1-2 3, Morgan Jones 1 0-0 2, Brianna Banks 7 3-5 17, Reshanda Gray 2 1-4 5, Alexyz Vaiioletama 2 1-2 5, Justine Hartman 1 0-0 2, Cassie Peoples 2 1-2 5, Bonnie Samuelson 1 0-0 3. Totals 24 14-23 66.

EAST (78): Elizabeth Williams 10 2-4 23, Cierra Burdick 3 0-0 7, Temi Fagbenie 0 0-0 0, Ariel Massengale 4 2-2 13, Bria Smith 4 2-2 10, Sara Hammond 0 0-0 0, Briyona Canty 2 0-1 4, Allyson Malott 1 0-0 3, Bria Goss 1 0-0 3, Samantha Logic 2 0-0 4, Amber Henson 2 1-2 5, Betnijah Laney 3 0-0 6. Totals 32 7-11 78.

Halftime -- East 46, West 27. 3-point goals -- East 4 (Mosqueda-Lewis 2, Orrange, Samuelson), West

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