

Arrington swaps sports for modeling

Written by Tom Fruehling

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As one of the managers for the Cedar Rapids Washington girls basketball team, Alanna Arrington would really rather be out there on the court playing with her friends.

It's just that she must miss too many practices and games.

A talented multi-sport athlete, she's swapped her sneakers for high-heels as a full-fledged professional fashion model.

In a career that's taken off in the past year, the high school junior is under contract with top-flight modeling agencies in St. Louis, Chicago and Los Angeles and soon, she hopes, New York and perhaps even Paris.

Magazine photo shoots and runway shows have taken her from one coast to the other and major cities in between.

She's had so many far-flung jobs lined up this year that she hasn't attended any regular classes at school. By a special arrangement worked out last summer, she's taking a full schedule of courses at Washington online.

Just turned 17 in November, her once normal teenage life has become a whirlwind.

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"It's been kind of crazy," said Arrington, a willowy hazel-eyed 5-foot-10 natural beauty who remains as unaffected as the little girl who began shooting hoops with her dad Anthony at the "Y" when she was six years old.

"I never ever thought I'd have this kind of experience. At most shows, I'm usually several years younger than the other girls," she said.

"And I've met girls from every corner of the world, from Russia, from London, all over. When I tell them I'm from Iowa, they say, 'Where's that?' It's insane. But it's been like a rush."

Growing up, her focus was mostly on athletics. She was born into sports.

Her self-professed "sports guy" dad was a champion boxer in his youth, her mom Amy (Person) a member of Washington's 1988 state basketball championship team.



Uncle Adrian was a star receiver at Michigan and played with the NFL New Orleans Saints. Numerous cousins have dotted local prep rosters.

Little sister Amyah, 15, meanwhile, is a freshman member of the Washington dance line and the Iowa Elite competitive cheerleading team, making her perhaps the most athletic of them all.

Alanna herself played everything, from T-ball to soccer. She was on Washington Coach Frank Howell's Junior Warriors basketball squad as a little kid and on Jane Boyd, AAU and club

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teams.

“I was pretty much into sports year-round,” she said. “I just seemed to pick up whatever I was in.”

She was the starting center fielder on the Washington softball team as an eighth grader and made the varsity volleyball and basketball teams as a sophomore. Still, she was not immune from the glitz and glamour of popular teen culture.

“I was always taller than the other girls. And people, even my friends, would say, ‘You’re so tall and so thin, you ought to be a model.’ And I thought that would be a pretty cool life.

“I remember telling my dad when I was about 12 that I was going to become a model and he thought it was just a phase.”

However, almost on a whim, she and her best friend Nichole Gearhart three years ago showed up at open call for aspiring models at Kliks Photography in Cedar Rapids. The session was put on by Mary and Jeff Clarke, owners of the Mother Model Management agency in St. Louis.

As a talent scout working out of Cedar Rapids, the former Mary Brown had “discovered” actor Ashton Kutcher at the Airliner in Iowa City and more recently Victoria’s Secret supermodel Karlie Kloss.

“All they did that day was take some pictures of us and said they’d keep in touch,” Arrington recalled of that first meeting.

But they were later invited to a fashion show in St. Louis and then, in the summer before their sophomore years at Washington, to spend two months in Los Angeles at modeling school.

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There was, needless to say, apprehension on the part of parents Amy, a Realtor with Skogman, and Anthony, Cedar Rapids branch manager for Manpower.

"It helped that my dad had known Jeff and Mary," Alanna said. "They knew we would be well-supervised. They kept a close watch on us. There was no way we were going to get into trouble."

She returned from a summer of photo shoots in Hollywood last year to her normal routine at Washington and played volleyball and basketball. And she worked part-time at the seasonal Dairy Queen on First Avenue in the parking lot of the Starlight Room tavern.

"I love that job," she said. "I usually treat myself with a junior vanilla cone."

As the year went on she started getting assignments around the Midwest from the Clarke's firm. More followed when she also signed with the major Next LAm modeling agency in California and Ford agency in Chicago. And she again spent the summer in Los Angeles under the tutelage of Mother Model Management.

"I'd say in the last year it's really become something serious," Arrington remarked. "I was kind of iffy about things, but now it's more than just a hobby."

"I've usually been gone once a week or so. I go to Chicago and St. Louis quite a bit. I've been back to LA twice and I had a photo shoot for the Sperry shoe company in Massachusetts. I've done a lot of shows for Nordstrom's."

"It's all been a little amazing."

Describing herself as "lean," not skinny, Alanna said she's lucky she doesn't seem to put weight on her size-two frame even though she's famous among her friends for her enormous appetite.

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"I love to eat, and I eat a lot," she said. "Nothing will ever keep me from eating. I work out twice a day, though, to keep fit. At the same "Y" where I played Junior Warriors when I was little."

In the fickle world of high fashion modeling, she has no idea what the future holds. But she hopes it evolves into a full-time career. Might she even follow the unlikely path of Cedar Rapids-born Ashton Kutcher?

"Who knows, you never know what might happen," she said with a sweetly genuine smile that shows off a sparkling personality.

As every model knows, a smile is a woman's best accessory.