

Hembera making big impact at little CVC

Written by Sher Jasperse

Saturday, 24 December 2011 17:12 -

She's fit, she's fast and she's having fun.

Never mind that her undermanned Cedar Valley Christian girls basketball team is 0-6 in its inaugural season as a member of the Iowa Girls High School Athletic Union.

Shelby Hembera, the Huskies' outstanding freshman, has scored in double figures in five of the six games, collecting a season-high 26 points in CVC's loss at Wapsie Valley on Tuesday.

She's fit because she has to be. The Huskies had only five regular players in uniform for the first six games, so Hembera and all the Huskies played start to finish with no rest.

Hembera is also agile and quick. A silky 5-foot-11, she shreds defenders to seize her shot, usually from the high post.

"She is unorthodox in that she attacks the basket in the way a lot of high school girls don't," says her coach, Craig Foote. "She can go off both feet. She can shoot with both hands, and she has a very quick first step. It's very hard to defend."

With Hembera scoring 60.2 percent of her team's points in their first six games, the Huskies haven't found a way to win yet, but they are relishing the competition.

CVC exited the Northern Illinois Christian Conference after the last school year for two reasons, says Foote. The first was to bring its contests closer to home.

The team was traveling routinely to Illinois, Wisconsin and Minnesota, making for some very late nights. The kids didn't mind it, he says, but it was rough on their schoolwork – and their parents.

Hembera making big impact at little CVC

Written by Sher Jasperse

Saturday, 24 December 2011 17:12 -

“We also wanted to increase the level of competition across the board,” says Foote.

As the season approached, the Huskies came perilously close to missing their opportunity. A couple of players decided not to play basketball this year, and a handful transferred to other schools.

Hembera considered that possibility too, she says, especially when a couple of her closest friends transferred to Marion.

“I’ve thought about it,” she says. “But I don’t think I would have gotten a lot of playing time. I think I made the right decision to stay here instead of going to a bigger school. This is like my home, and it’s a really nice environment where everybody really encourages us.”

Hembera has been playing basketball in her driveway with her parents and younger sister since she was in primary school, she says. “I have loved playing ever since I was little, and it just kind of came naturally to me.”

A CVC student since second grade, she is happy to be playing her prep career at a high school with only 65 students. Students mix freely among the grades and are very supportive of the team, she says. She also appreciates being in a place where her faith is nurtured.

“Before every game I ask God to shine through me and bless our team so we don’t have injuries,” she says. “It gives me a lot of strength to know He’s with me.”

Losing has tested the team, admits Foote, but not broken its resolve.

“We’re focused on improving, on teaching the game and the values it offers – resiliency being one of them, and keeping a positive attitude. Those are not based on winning or losing, and

Hembera making big impact at little CVC

Written by Sher Jasperse

Saturday, 24 December 2011 17:12 -

Shelby is a great example of that. She's always got a great attitude, whether we win or lose."

The uncommonly poised ninth grader says it "feels really great" to be leading her team, even as she pursues a host of personal and team goals.

"I hope we can all come together as a team and be strong whether we win or lose," she says. "I want to become a better post player and try to get 13 points per game."

With a 16.2-point average, she has that one nailed.

After hitting 9 of 21 free throws in last Saturday's loss to Dunkerton, she is working on her form at the line, she says with a wince.

She also hopes the Huskies can win a game – a prospect that seems likelier as the season progresses and the team begins to jell. Junior Lindsay Cach joined Hembera in double figures in a recent game and the Huskies held a third-quarter lead before running out of gas.

Hembera jokes that her tiny team has become a bit of a spectacle at their games.

"There's our little adorable team walking in," she says, "but that doesn't really show what we bring to the court."

The Huskies will get a critical boost after the break when senior point guard Ellen Rodriguez rejoins the team after a semester off.

"We like to run and press," says Foote. "But when you're sitting with five players, you can't do that because you can't get in foul trouble. When we get our sixth girl back, we'll try some trapping."

Hembera making big impact at little CVC

Written by Sher Jasperse

Saturday, 24 December 2011 17:12 -

Longer term, the team will be bolstered by a strong upcoming group of fourth through eighth graders, says Foote. Among them is Hembera's sister Molly, a sixth grader, who he says is just as explosive as Shelby.

But for the foreseeable future, Hembera the elder will be the yeast that keeps the team rising.

"She's not the biggest or the strongest girl out there," Foote says. "But she really excels in the high post, and she can go both low and high. In our last game they basically triple-teamed her the whole game. Other teams are recognizing her prowess."