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UW women's basketball: Russell commits

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January 6, 2007

As an 11-year-old, Jamie Russell used to hide the hair under her boxing helmet so the referees wouldn't know she was a girl.

This week, Russell - a junior guard for the Rock Falls (Ill.) High School girls basketball team - could no longer hide her feelings about her college future.

She wanted to wait. But whenever Russell considered the numerous choices, her thoughts always came back to University of Wisconsin women's basketball coach Lisa Stone and UW, where she'd already made three unofficial visits.

"I liked everything about it," Russell said Friday. "I felt at home - the first time. ... I love (Coach Stone). She's a coach I can get along with. I really liked her."

The 5-foot-7 Russell, who primarily plays off-guard but can play point guard, said she orally committed to Stone Tuesday after visiting the school that day. She had offers from Purdue, Iowa, Iowa State, Bowling Green, Dayton and Illinois, said Pacesetter Basketball president John Waring, who's served as a trainer for Russell, UW sophomore center Caitlin Gibson and UW recruits Lin Zastrow of Jefferson and Ashley Thomas of Glenview, Ill.

Following AAU teammate Thomas, Russell becomes the second UW recruit in the 2008-09 class.

Russell is averaging 21.6 points, 6.1 rebounds, 5.9 steals and 4.0 assists per game this season, Waring said. However, Russell - who said she was honorable mention all-state as a freshman and sophomore - is on crutches while sidelined for several more weeks with a sprained meniscus, medial collateral ligament and anterior cruciate ligament in her right knee that she injured in practice in December.

Waring said Russell, Rock Falls' all-time leading scorer, needs to improve her 3-point shot but has "explosiveness in the open court" and is a shutdown defender.

"She's probably considered the fastest from end line to end line in the state," he said.

Waring said Russell won 11 Golden Gloves amateur boxing matches, including nine against boys, when she was 11 and played tackle football, leading her league in rushing.

"This kid is a tough kid. ... We are talking about a really exceptional

athlete," Waring said.

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