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## Unselfish excellence

By Joe Aguilar

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She'd love to have a 30-point game to her credit.

But what, like her resume needs it to attract the interest of major-college women's basketball programs?

Understand Notre Dame, Stanford and Wisconsin, among others, have their fingers crossed that sometime in the next eight months, she might call one of them and say, "Where do I sign?"

If it was all about scoring for Sarah Boothe, if Sarah Boothe was all about Sarah Boothe, she could ball-hog.

The 6-foot-5 junior could hold the ball aloft and say to her teammates, "If you want it, come and get it."

No one likely would be successful, for no one likely could reach that high.

Instead, however, Warren's soft-talking star with the soft shooting touch would rather distinguish herself as a team player.

One way to do that is by passing the basketball.

So while Boothe averaged 16.2 points per game in a season in which she poured in a career-high-tying 29 for the second season in a row, she also averaged 2.6 assists.

Against conference rival Libertyville in mid-December, she dished out 9 assists, in addition to scoring 10 points.

Did we mention she plays center?

Her commitment to unselfish play is just one reason why Boothe repeats as captain of the Daily Herald Lake County All-Area girls basketball team.

Other reasons?

Leading the Blue Devils to North Suburban Conference, regional and sectional titles for the third straight year, averaging 8.7 rebounds and 3.4 blocks per game, and posting 13 double-doubles.

Nine times this season Boothe opted not to pass so she could take a 3-pointer. She hit 5 —

the first 5 of her career.

“She made really good passes,” said Warren senior guard Melanie Duplessis. “In practice, she’d like to hold the ball (above her head and wait) just to see if she could make that pass. She really likes passing the ball.”

Added Duplessis with a laugh: “I think she wants to be a point guard.”

Hey, if that’s what it will take for the Blue Devils to return to state — they made it Boothe’s freshman year but have been denied by Buffalo Grove in the supersectional the last two years — Boothe would probably do it.

Boothe — an Associated Press Class AA second-team all-stater — says she was “mad” this season had to end. Mind you, she wasn’t thinking about herself.

“We had the best seniors this season,” she said of Duplessis, Stacey Leach, Deanna Payne and Brittany Innes. “They really stepped up and carried the team this year. It was more frustrating for me to watch them (after the supersectional loss).”

Know this, too, about Sarah Boothe: Her team-first, whatever-it-takes attitude is no facade.

She’s been earning accolades since her freshman year, when she was named all-conference and All-Area, but through it all she’s remained as humble as a player who never plays.

Warren coach John Stanczykiewicz says Boothe “remains grounded,” is “down to earth,” “humble,” “accessible” and a “great teammate.”

And every free period at school, Stanczykiewicz adds, his star is in the library.

No wonder she’s an A student whose academic load includes a couple of advanced-placement classes.

As for her play on the court, Boothe showed maturity there, too.

“Sarah has a great knack for sharing the basketball,” Stanczykiewicz said. “She’ll pass out of double-teams, and she’s not one to force a lot of shots.

“You watch the film and sometimes you’ll see four or five players literally standing around her. We won’t even pass it in. We’ll just find a Melanie Duplessis, a Stacey Leach, a Shana Shepherd or a Brittany Innes. Or, Sarah will get the ball, recognize the pressure and dump it into a Deanna Payne or a Lory Shaw.”

While Boothe added the 3-point shot to her already loaded repertoire this winter and developed her game as a passer, she also displayed the skills she has since her first varsity season. She finishes with either hand, scores with a jump hook, holds the ball high when she secures a rebound — why is that so hard for some tall players to learn? — and runs the floor almost effortlessly.

“She’s still incredibly gifted,” Stanczykiewicz said. “She works HARD on her game.”

“She’s automatic (when she shoots),” Johnsbury coach Mike Toussaint said after Boothe scored 18 points on his Skyhawks in the sectional final at Mundelein. “She’s tough.”

Boothe ended the season with 1,403 points in her career. Which means if she averages around 20 points per game next season, assuming she stays healthy and Warren makes another lengthy run in the state tournament, she should reach 2,000 points.

Before her senior season starts, she hopes to have committed to a college.

She and her dad plan to visit Stanford this month. She's already visited Notre Dame once and Wisconsin twice on unofficial visits.

"I'm leaning toward Notre Dame and Wisconsin, but I'm still looking at Stanford," Boothe said. "I'm still keeping an open mind because there are so many schools out there, and I don't know if I've found the right one yet."

Whichever school lands her, Duplessis knows that school will be lucky.

"I loved playing with her," said Duplessis, who competed for three varsity seasons with Boothe. "She's such a good person, on and off the court. And she's such a good player. She's improved so much over the (last three) years. I like passing her the ball. I like getting those assists."

Team player Sarah Boothe likes getting those assists, too.

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