

From North to the Far East

Lakeville North's Cassie Rochel and Chaska's Brooke Brown play for Adidas Aces in Japan

Lakeville North's Cassie Rochel and Chaska's Brooke Brown received an uncommon honor this past summer, when both were selected to play for the Candace Parker Aces Adidas National Team on its trip to the Far East. They were among a handful of top players from cross the nation to travel east for a five-day training camp in Los Angeles and an eight-day playing trip to Japan.

Rochel and Brown talked to the Breakdown about their experiences during the two-week trek, during which they played several top Japanese teams and met their namesake, Los Angeles' Sparks' superstar Candace Parker.

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Cassie Rochel, Lkv North

Breakdown: First, can you tell me how the honor came about? What was the selection process? How did you feel when you got the nod to go?

Rochel: Mark Smith and Bruce Borowicz (her coaches with the Minnesota Stars AAU program) nominated me. It was Adidas-sponsored and the guys that run the Adidas Tournaments were the ones to pick. They saw me play and got my records, awards, stats, etc. and I was selected based on that.

We had just lost our section final game and the next morning I found out I had been selected to the Adidas National Team to go to Japan. So, I guess I was sad and happy at the same time.

Breakdown: What kind of preparation did you do for the trip, both on and off the court?

Rochel: It was a very busy summer. My high school team lifts weights and practices through the summer. We also have summer league. With the Minnesota Stars we had five (players) out of the state tournaments. Pretty much the month of July we were traveling for basketball. I tried to fit in a few lessons in between traveling. There really was not much down time.

Breakdown: Can you give me a short itinerary of your trip? How was it divided between work/play?

Rochel: We spent five days in Los Angeles, getting to know the coaches and team. We practiced once a day and had a lot of time for fun. We went to Venice Beach, Magic Mountain, a (WNBA's Los Angeles) Sparks game, where we met Candace Parker. We practiced at UCLA and I got to tour the campus.

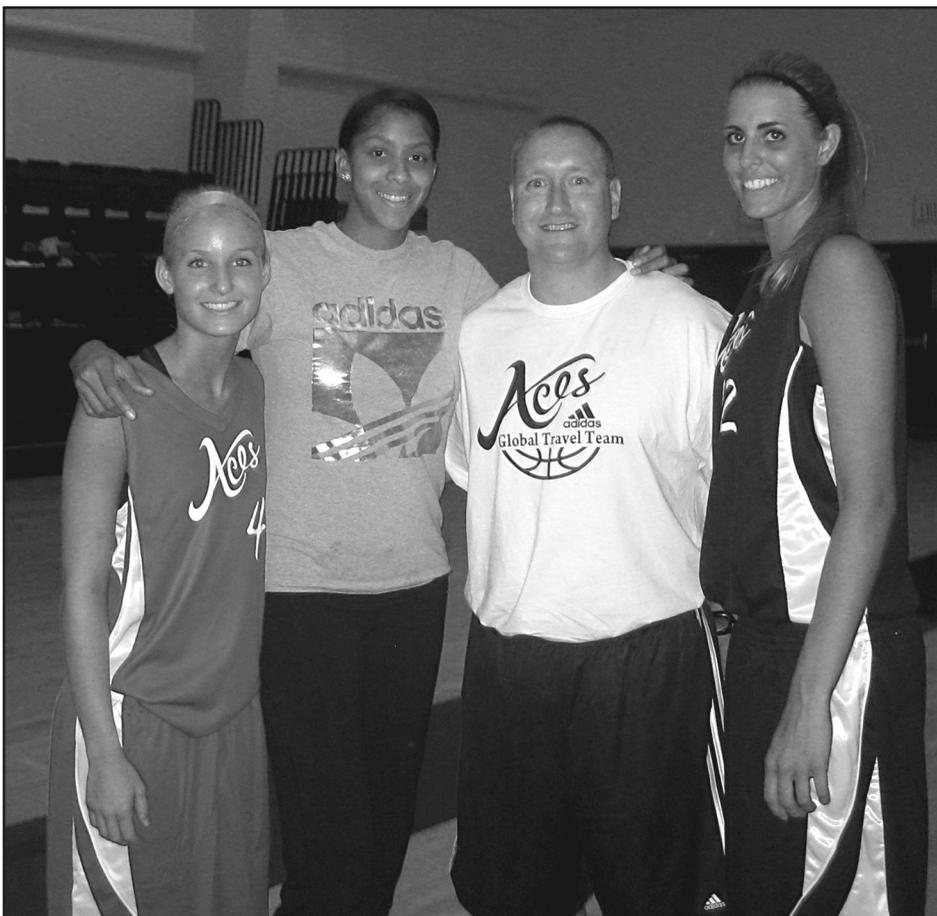
Then we were in Japan for eight days. In those eight days we played one game a day for five days. There was a lot of travel time, but it still left time for shopping in Tokyo, a Japanese baseball game, amusement rides – including the best roller coaster I have ever been on. We practiced at the Teen Center for the youth on the Army base that we stayed at.

Breakdown: What was the most surprising thing you experienced on the trip, again, both on and off the court?

Rochel: I would say on the court, was how talented and disciplined the players are. They practice up to six hours a day, six days a week. Off the court was how respectful everyone is. They treated us like royalty.

Breakdown: What was your favorite part of the trip, again, both on and off the court?

Rochel: Meeting such great players and girls and playing with some of the most talented guards in the U.S. I was amazed at some of the passes I got and how well we played together after only have a few practices together. It was great meeting Candace Parker. She is such a great person and role



Submitted photo

Brooke Brown (far left) and Cassie Rochel (far right) pose for a photo with their team's namesake, Los Angeles Sparks' star Candace Parker.

model.

Off the court, would be going to downtown Tokyo and eating at one of their sit down restaurants and experiencing their culture. Just traveling to a foreign country itself was an awesome experience.

The Japanese Basketball League invited us back again next April. All the seniors from the team (nine of us) will be going back again to play in April. It was an amazing opportunity and to get to go again is an honor.

Breakdown: What were your on-court results, both personally and as a team?

Rochel: As a team we went 1-4. I personally was pleased with the amount of playing time I got and I got to start most of the games.

Breakdown: What kind of representation was on the team? You and Brooke were from Minnesota, but where was the rest of the team from? How was the level of play?

Rochel: There were three girls from Oregon, three from Texas, two from North Carolina and one

each from Nevada, South Carolina, Tennessee and California.

It was a high level of players. Two of the girls were ranked in the top 10 by Hoopgurlz. You have girls who have already committed to Oklahoma, Duke, Texas A&M, Virginia Tech and a lot being recruited by high level colleges.

Brooke Brown, Chaska

Breakdown: First, can you tell me how the honor came about? What was the selection process? How did you feel when you got the nod to go?

Brown: The Adidas National team was put together months ago, and I knew Cassie was fortunate enough to be invited. Pops, the organizer of the trip for Adidas, and the head coach, Ziggy, saw me play in Las Vegas in April and took notice, although I was not aware of anything at the time. This was the first they had seen me play, as this was my first year playing for MN Stars, an Adidas-

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sponsored club.

Our team played in Indiana in mid-July and we played exceptionally well, winning the tournament. Pops and Ziggy approached me after the second game and asked if I would be interested in playing overseas with the team in April, when they were planning to do a senior trip. The following day they asked if I had a passport and told me a spot might be available for the August trip to Japan. After the final game when we won the tournament Pops pulled me aside and told me I was going to Japan. After the trophy presentation he announced it to our team. He told our team that you should always play hard and value every minute you are on the court, because you never know who is watching you, and what opportunities might arise.

I was absolutely thrilled when Pops told me I was going to LA and Japan. I knew this was an amazing opportunity to play with some of the top players in the country in a part of the world I had never been to.

Breakdown: What kind of preparation did you do for the trip, both on and off the court?

Brown: Since I was invited in mid-July, there wasn't a lot of time to prepare for the trip. We had a few days off after Indiana, then we played in Kansas and a few days later in South Carolina. We returned from SC at 1:00 am on August 1st, and I played in the Sweet Sixteen tournament with my Chaska team that day and the next. On Monday I finally got my passport, made the final decision to verbal to Northern Iowa, made a few phone calls to coaches, packed and then I flew to LA early the next day.

Breakdown: Can you give me a short itinerary

of your trip? How was it divided between work/play?

Brown: The first day we arrived in LA we met the coaches and the team, practiced for two hours, received all of our Adidas gear (it filled an enormous duffle bag), and went to dinner. The next four days we practiced two hours per day, and then we kept busy with activities such as attending a Sparks game and meeting Candace Parker, going to Magic Mountain amusement park, the beach, out to dinner etc.

In Japan a lot more of our time revolved around basketball. We played one game a day for five days. On game days we would eat, hang out at the youth center for an hour or two, then travel to our game (usually 30-90 minutes away). We usually arrived an hour early for warm-ups and right before the game we would exchange gifts with the other team. We played 40-minute games, and each game was a new experience. It was really fun after the games taking pictures with all of the girls as they were really excited to see us.

While in Japan our team hung out together a lot when we had down time. We also attended a Professional baseball game, went on a huge roller coaster, shopped a couple of days, road the train and ate at a Japanese restaurant (I would never try octopus again).

Breakdown: What was the most surprising thing you experienced on the trip, again, both on and off the court?

Brown: The most surprising thing off the court was that most of the restrooms at the schools we played at had only one or two normal toilets, the

rest were holes in the ground that you squat over (someone said it's supposed to be more sanitary – I don't know about that).

On the court was how amazingly well they played together as a team. They probably averaged five passes per possession, and almost every possession ended with an open shot.

Breakdown: What was your favorite part of the trip, again, both on and off the court?

Brown: Off the court was getting to know new people (coaches, teammates etc.) from various parts of the country.

On the court was playing with some of the top players in the country.

Breakdown: What were your on-court results, both personally and as a team?

Brown: Our team was 1-4 in the five games we played. That might sound really disappointing, but we played professional teams and university teams that practice many, many hours a day and play really good team ball. Personally, I worked hard every minute I was on the court and it paid off as I earned a starting spot the third game.

Breakdown: What kind of representation was on the team? How was the level of play?

Brown: The level of play was great. Our team had some of the top rated players in the country. We had three players from Texas (the two posts from Texas have both verballed Texas A&M), two players from North Carolina – (one that has verballed Duke), three from Oregon, one from Nevada (she has verballed Oklahoma), and one each from South Carolina, Tennessee and California. ■



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