



My daughter Amber went to the University of Maine on a full basketball scholarship. Mandy Carter-Zegarowski was directly responsible for developing Amber into a Division I basketball player and guiding us, her parents, through the stress of the recruiting process. She communicated with coaches on our behalf and gave us insight into what situation would benefit Amber should we select certain schools/programs.

Mandy identified Amber during her middle school years as having unique athletic abilities. She fostered those abilities in Amber during the next 4 years of coaching her in high school, such that, Amber was noticed by college coaches prior to her junior year. Mandy guided us through AAU programs, recommending appropriate teams and AAU coaches that would best suit Amber. She also set us up with an individual trainer in order to optimize Amber's basketball development. Mandy rearranged the offense of the high school team in order to showcase Amber and develop her abilities at the position she would most likely be recruited at by college coaches. As a result, Amber left Ipswich High School as the all time leading scorer for both boys and girls with more than 1,800 points while grabbing 1,100 rebounds. She set many of the Ipswich High School percentage records during her career there. Amber was a McDonald's All-American Nominee, a Boston Globe Dream Team, and a two-time Boston Herald All-Scholastic Team section. Amber "Committed" to the University of Maine in September of her senior year.

Sincerely,
Kurt and Pat Smith



UMaine lands Ipswich All-Time Leading Scorer Smith with Scholarship

By Mike Grenier, staff writer

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While most of the basketball-playing world is asleep at 6 a.m., Amber Smith takes her game to the Ipswich YMCA. She's guaranteed solitude at that time of day. The way she looks at it, there's always something to work on, particularly in the off-season. "It's good to go out there," Smith, 17, said of the rise-and-shine workouts. "I can't (stay away) from the game. It's horrible to feel out of shape." Ipswich High coach Mandy Zegarowski appreciates that kind of attitude from Smith, who will go into her senior year as the leading scorer in the history of the girls program with 1,341 points. Another coach who'll be impressed by Smith's work ethic is Cindy Blodgett at Division 1 University of Maine in Orono. Smith could have accepted a scholarship from a D-1 or D-2 school in a warmer climate, but a visit to UMaine last weekend sealed the deal in no uncertain terms. Smith made a verbal commitment to the Black Bears and will make it official on the national signing day, which is Nov. 12. "I have no doubt that it's the best choice for me," said the 5-foot-9 Smith, who averaged 22.3 points and 11.8 rebounds last season when she was named the Cape Ann League Small Player of the Year. "It's just so perfect." Smith, who is a National Honor Society student, was looking for a school with a good engineering program within an eight hour radius of Ipswich. She didn't want a city campus or a commuter school. Maine, of course, is neither of those things. The Black Bears will be getting Ipswich's best Division 1 prospect since Jane Benirowski, who played at Providence College in the 1970s, but improving Maine's status in the America East Conference will be a mighty challenge for Smith and her future teammates. Maine went 7-23 last season and Smith can only watch from afar this year. If she makes any kind of impact in preseason next year, Smith's first collegiate game would come against Duke at Alford Arena on the Maine campus. How's that for an opening test? "That's really so cool," said Smith. "I mean, Duke. It's just so awesome." Smith fully expects that Blodgett will bring out the best in her. Blodgett is a certified legend at Maine, where she scored 3,005 career points and led the nation in scoring her sophomore and junior years. Blodgett went on to play in the WNBA and overseas. An ex-great player doesn't necessarily translate into a super coach, but Blodgett is about to embark on just her second year with the Black Bears. Her players trust her with the future of the program. "Her philosophy is that there are no guaranteed spots," Smith said of Blodgett. "Whoever works for it will play, and I'll definitely work for it. I have no expectations for my freshman year. I'll work for it and see how it goes for playing time." With another year to go at Ipswich, where she is sure to draw gimmick defenses and physical play no matter if she's playing inside or outside, Smith won't be flying under the radar for a single minute this coming season. But that in itself should be good preparation for the next phase of her career. "From what I've heard, I think Amber could have an immediate impact as a college player," said Zegarowski. "Amber is a scorer. Defensively, she will continue to develop, but she'll score at the (off guard) or (small forward) position. I think she'll out-strength a lot of players. Maine will be a great place for her. With Amber it's really important to get along with the coach and her teammates. She went up there last weekend and I think she really bonded with coach Blodgett." Smith has a sterling reputation for coming up big in the most important games for Ipswich. She had 34 points against Watertown, 36 versus Swampscott and 24 against Bedford, all in state tourney games the last couple of years. She just keeps getting better. "I think the biggest improvement has come in her perimeter shooting and playing away from the basket," said Zegarowski. "Amber has been 5-9 since seventh grade, so she had to start developing her game away from the basket." Smith wasn't exactly enthralled with the overall recruiting process, feeling overwhelmed at times ("It was stressful," she said), but Zegarowski made it more tolerable for her. "Coach Zegarowski does so much for me," said Smith. "She's my biggest critic, but she has my back more than anybody. She's been so supportive. My dad and my entire family have helped me a lot, too." Oh, and those early morning workouts at the Ipswich YMCA aren't just for the benefit of Maine. Smith badly wants the Tigers to have a big year in the Cape Ann League and the state tourney. "We're striving to get better," said Smith. "Our goal is to make it to (the North sectional final) at (Lowell's) Tsongas Arena."