

Waterloo native off to dynamite start in Division I

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

SYRACUSE — Along with their passion for basketball, Sandy Mitchell and Michael Jordan have at least one other thing in common.

They're two of the few players who can draw loud cheers by stepping onto an opposing team's basketball court.

Jordan was given a mighty ovation upon his return to the NBA in Indianapolis on March 19. Slightly more than a month earlier, Mitchell had experienced a similar reaction at SU's Manley Field House.

As starting players on the Seton Hall and Syracuse University women's basketball teams were introduced on Feb. 15, polite applause spilled forth from the approximately 500 people in attendance.

Yet the sound level rose several decibels when Mitchell took the floor, thanks to more than 100 loyal supporters who had journeyed to Syracuse from her home town of Waterloo.

"You know, it was kind of funny. My team picks on me because they say I'm so serious when I get introduced — but tonight I just started laughing," Mitchell commented after the game.

Mitchell, along with her fans, had good reason to continue smiling on her "homecoming" night. Although the freshman point guard did not place in the scoring column, she dished out six assists as Seton Hall motored to a 66-56 victory over Syracuse.

Mitchell's efforts were not only steady — she committed just three turnovers — but also frequently dazzling. Three times during the second half, she fired precision passes from around midcourt that her teammates received under the basket and converted into easy layups.

"I didn't get points tonight, but I wasn't getting the shots. My job was to get the ball inside," Mitchell said. "If my job is to pass, I'm going to pass the ball. If my team needs me to score, I'm going to score for them."

It's this type of versatile play and attitude that earned Mitchell a starting position through out much of the 1994-95 season during which she helped the Pirates to a 24-9 record. She capped her freshman year off by scoring five points in a 59-45 season-ending loss to defending national champion North Carolina in an NCAA West Regional second-round game on March 18.

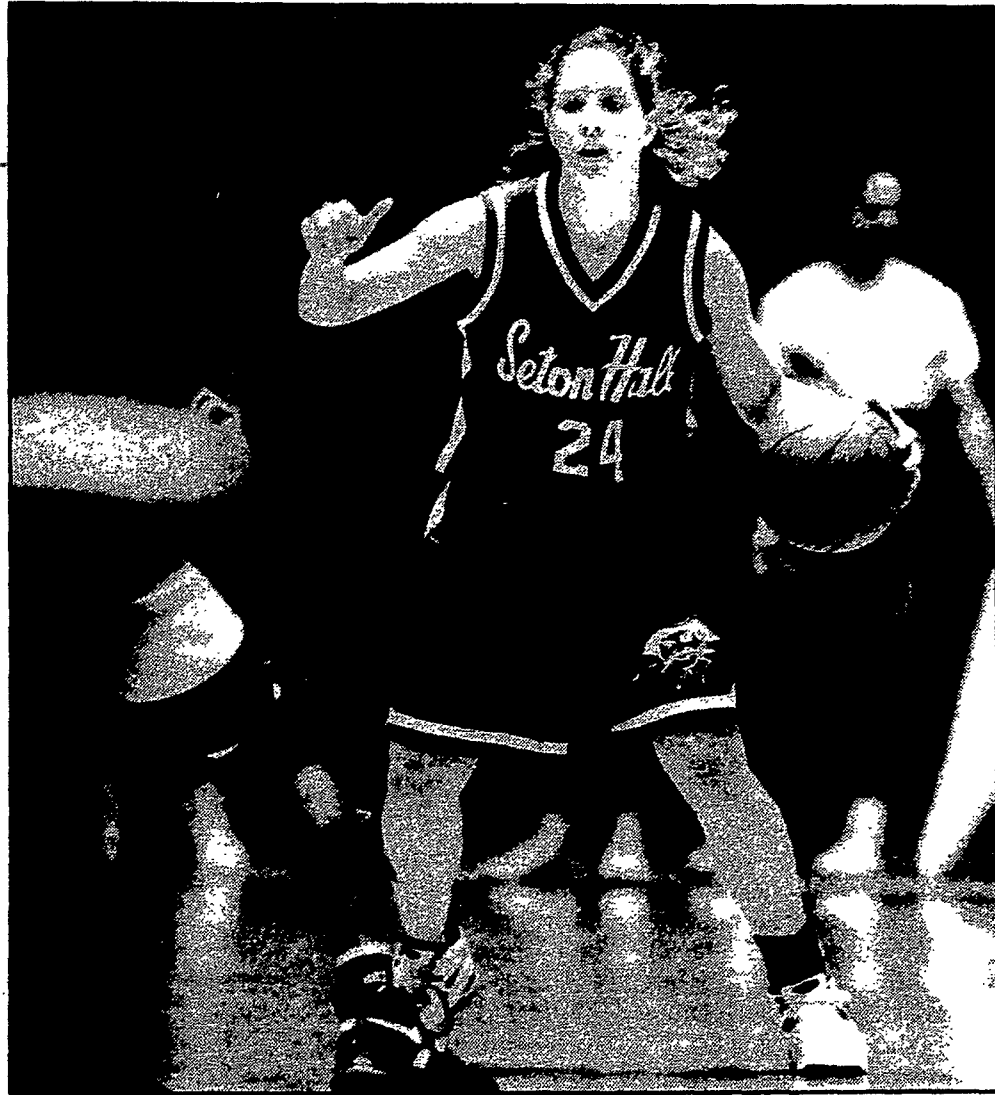
The season highlight for Mitchell came in February, however, when she earned herself a fairly nice birthday present. After scoring 16 points against Providence on Feb. 8 and 12 more against top-ranked Connecticut on Feb. 12 — her 19th birthday — Mitchell was named the Big East Rookie of the Week.

It's been a quick transition to Division I hoops for the 5-foot-6-inch Mitchell, who came to the South Orange, N.J., Catholic college on a full scholarship after being named the top female high-school player in New York state in 1993-94. She led Waterloo Central to three straight Section Class B titles, and holds the Indians' all-time career records for scoring (2,270 points) and assists (580). Many fans who traveled to Manley also remember Mitchell from her CYO playing days while she attended St. Mary's School up through the eighth grade.

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S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

Waterloo native Sandy Mitchell, the starting point guard on the Seton Hall women's basketball team, had six assists in a Feb. 15 game against Syracuse University.



Mitchell encourages her teammates from the sidelines during Seton Hall's 66-56 victory over host Syracuse.

Mitchell obviously fits into the "local girl makes good" category — and her Seton Hall coach, Phyllis Mangina, believes that better days still lie ahead.

"She's going to be a heck of a player for us," Mangina predicted.

Provided Mitchell doesn't get left behind when the team bus departs — something that almost happened last month.

Long after the other fans had filed out of Manley, Mitchell was lingering by courtside exchanging hugs and kisses with her many family members and friends — and also showing off her seven-month-old godson, Christopher, to the Seton Hall players.

As the clock continued to tick, Mitchell apparently decided that she'd provided enough assists that evening so she could ask a teammate, Dawn Johnson, to return the favor.

"Dawn, make sure they don't leave without me!" Mitchell pleaded.

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