

# ROCHELLE CHERRY, BASKETBALL QUEEN

When Rochelle Cherry was in eighth grade at Siena Catholic Academy in Brighton, she told her mother that she wanted to try out for the school's cheer-leading squad. But her mother, Cora, had a different idea, considering her daughter stood over 6 feet tall.

"She said: 'I don't think you're going to make it as a cheerleader. Why don't you go out for basketball?'"

That turned out to be the best maternal advice Rochelle may have ever heard. Rochelle exchanged dreams of holding pompoms for the realities of shooting baskets, and hasn't looked back since. A senior at Nazareth Academy, Rochelle — who's 6 feet 3 inches — is the greatest basketball player in the school's history, according to her coach, Chris Belmont, the school's athletic director.

"She is a very good student of the game," Belmont said. "Whatever you teach her, she'll grasp. She's developed into one of the area's best players."

In fact, area coaches and sportswriters voted Rochelle a member of the *Democrat and Chronicle* newspaper's All-Greater Rochester Girls Basketball Team three times, including this year. That's because Rochelle is the queen of firsts when it comes to Nazareth basketball, a title earned by the following achievements during her four years of play for the school. To wit, Rochelle, the first girl in school history to score more than 1,000 career points and make more than 1,000 career rebounds, holds the following records at Nazareth:

○ Most points in a career, 1,336.

○ Most rebounds in a career, 1,052, and in a season, 310 in 1998-99.

○ Most blocks in a career, 385, and in a season, 121 in 1996-1997.

The teams Rochelle has played on have won more than 80 percent of their games and, in 1999, the center led her team to its first sectional title ever.

"That's always going to be in history here," she said during an interview in the Nazareth auditorium.

Although she didn't really learn the game until she was a teenager, Rochelle said she has become addicted to the feverish pitch of basketball.

"I like the intensity," she said. "I get all hyped up before I go out, and I try to be as aggressive as I can on the court."

Belmont said many an opponent has rued the day she ran into Rochelle as she defended her end of the court.

"She's just a presence," he said. "Kids who drive the lane through think twice about it after the first time."

Rochelle's basketball exploits have made her the school's first-ever Division I college scholarship winner, and she will attend the University of South Florida in the fall on a full basketball scholarship. In a statement about her signing with the school, USF coach Jerry Ann Winters called Rochelle one of the top players in the northeastern United States.

"We have a steal," Winters said. "Rochelle has the potential to be a very, very good college basketball player. Rochelle is a big recruit. She is a good scorer, and a good rebounder from the block. Rochelle is very effective on the block, she runs the floor and understands the game."

Rochelle is also a winner academically, having made the school's honor roll throughout her senior year. Her journalism teacher last year, Sister Mary Anne Coughlin, SSJ, said her student enjoyed writing sports stories for the school paper and other school publications. Sister Coughlin added that Rochelle comes off as down-to-earth and serves as a bridge-builder among her peers.

"I see her in the cafeteria walking back and forth with her lunch and plopping down and talking to anybody," Sister Coughlin said. "As a person, she's got the goods. She's done a lot for Nazareth as far as putting on a good image."

For a young woman described as soft-spoken by those who know her, Rochelle has decided to explore a career in a perhaps unexpected field — broadcasting. She plans to major in communications at USF, and harbors hopes of broadcasting sports events someday.

"I just want to be on TV," she says with a smile. "I like talking. I think I could be a good communicator if I had the right skills."

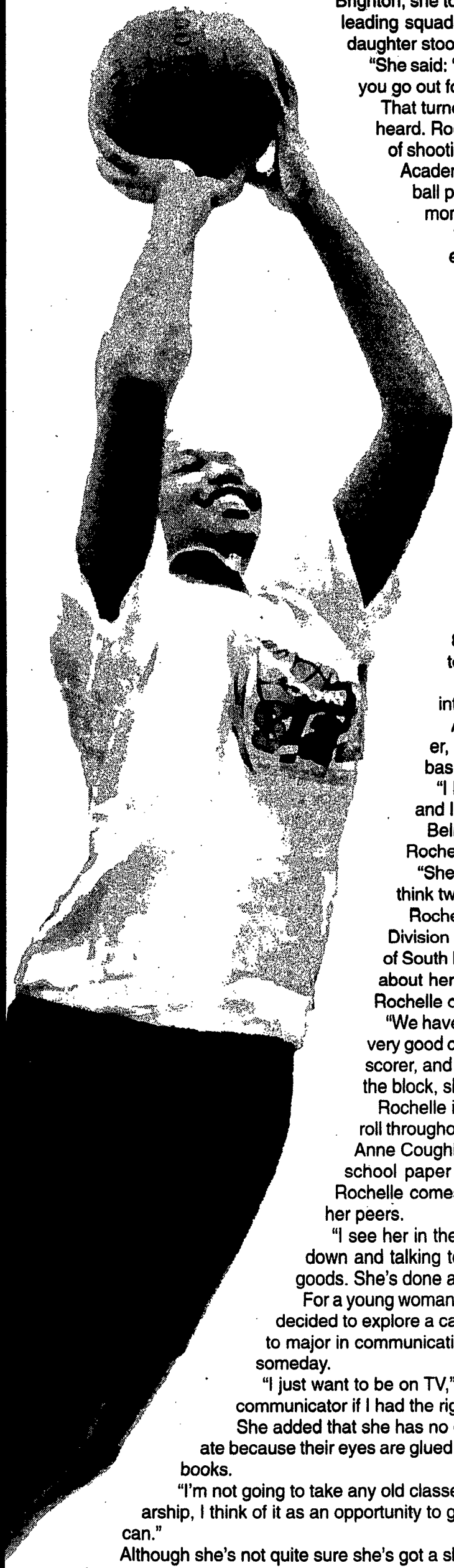
She added that she has no desire to wind up like some college athletes who never graduate because their eyes are glued to visions of professional careers rather than the pages of textbooks.

"I'm not going to take any old classes just to play basketball," she said. "When I think of my scholarship, I think of it as an opportunity to get a free education, and I'm going to get as much out of it as I can."

Although she's not quite sure she's got a shot at playing in the WNBA, she believes she'll play some professional ball somewhere after college. But even if she did make the big bucks as an athlete, Rochelle said she would give some of her good fortune to others, maybe by setting up a sports camp for underprivileged children.

Along those lines of thinking of others, her faith in God is important to her, Rochelle said, noting she sings alto in the choir during services at First Genesis Baptist Church Fellowship Hall in Rochester.

"I think that all of the talents I've acquired is not by chance," she said. "There's a reason. I'm going to use them to give back to God, to give back to the community what God has given me."



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ROB CULLIVAN

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