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Bound for Motown; Softball star off to Detroit on scholarship

MIKE BENNETT / The Daily News
Sports - Friday, April 20, 2007 Updated @ 8:31:35 AM

If city of Detroit officials are looking for an ambassador to promote the Motor City, they don't have to look any further than one of their newest collegiate athletes.

"I've always loved Detroit. I can't wait to get there," said Chatham's Ellen Sinclair, who has accepted a combined athletic/academic scholarship to the University of Detroit Mercy, where she will play for the Titans women's softball team.

Sinclair is following her older sister Jordan, through the Detroit-Windsor tunnel. Jordan, 23, still attends Wayne State University's graduate program, working on her PhD in biology.

Jordan was a standout pitcher/utility player in her four seasons with the Warriors' softball team. She served as an assistant to the athletic director at Wayne State as well as a pitching coach at Macomb Community College this past school year.

"Jordan just loves living in Detroit, she said she has a great time over there," said Ellen.

Living on campus in downtown Detroit is not a concern for Sinclair. She says going across the border is second nature for her family father Mike, mother Karen and brother Greg. She said she's been going to Tigers' games for as long as she can remember, plus watching Jordan's games for four years.

"It's an exciting city, I'm looking forward to living there," said the 18-year-old Grade 12 student at Chatham-Kent Secondary School.

Sinclair had contacts from other schools across the United States, including Wayne State and as far away as Florida, but Mercy was always her first choice.

"I wanted to be close to home, No. 1," she said of turning down schools in better climates.

"And Mercy is a beautiful campus. It has higher academic standards than the others. It's a small, private school and with fewer people in my classes, I'll be able to get a lot more focus," said Sinclair, who will study environmental engineering.

Another factor in her decision was Mike Sikora, her Windsor Wildcats' midget coach, whose daughter Andrea is a former softball star at Mercy.

It turns out coach Sikora was Sinclair's biggest booster to the Mercy coaching staff.

"Mike told me years ago, 'You'd better be ready to sign this girl when she's ready,'" Mercy coach Bob Wilkerson said of Sikora's advice.

"And Jordan told me that Ellen was a better ball player than she was. Those are two pretty good recommendations," Wilkerson said.

The Mercy coach saw Sinclair play last year in Guelph at the Canadian national tournament, and what he saw justified the scouting reports.

"What I like the most is how versatile she is," Wilkerson said.

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"She will likely play outfield for us, but she can play anywhere. With her bat and her versatility, we know we can use her right away."

Wilkerson said he is also impressed with Sinclair's academic background.

"She's a very intelligent girl. I don't think we can go wrong with an all-round student like Ellen."

Sinclair played in the Chatham Girls Minor Softball Association system before joining the Wildcats program at age 13.

"You get more opportunities playing at the Tier I level, we're always playing tournaments in the States against better competition, so you get seen more."

She was picked up by Chinguacousy for the Canadian midget tournament last summer. She went 11-for-36 in 12 games, helping the Cougars to the silver medal.

Shortly after the nationals, she was selected to the Canadian junior team for the Pan Am championships in Puerto Rico in November. She went 4-for-8 with four RBIs as Canada qualified for this year's world junior women's championships in Poland.

Sinclair showed her versatility as she pitched and played third base for the Wildcats, third base and outfield for Chinguacousy, first base and outfield for the national team.

Sinclair has played and excelled in virtually every sport at CKSS. She is also an outstanding ringette player.



"It's hard to compare or rate athletes from the different eras, but Ellen is certainly up there with the best we've ever had," said Ed Myers, a teacher/coach at CKSS for 30 years.

"She's feisty and competitive, very goal-orientated. She's played at a very elite level in every sport.

"I'm looking forward to watching her next year," said Myers, a Wayne State grad himself.

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