

Harrow teen takes basketball skills to Europe

By DANIELLA GIRGENTI

Harrow High School student Claire Harris, 16, loves basketball. Her skills and passion for the sport recently took her out of her small hometown and into Europe.

Harris was chosen to make a trek to Ireland and Wales along with 29 other Canadian girls between July 4 and 18. The two weeks of sightseeing and ball playing included a match against Ireland's national women's basketball team and touring medieval castles.

As an avid player, Harris plays on her high school team, a travel team and has attended basketball camps for the past few years through a North American association called the National Basketball Camps. Since she was 14, Harris' parents have made the 12-hour drive to North Carolina where their daughter lives, eats, and breathes basketball for five days in the summer.

It was through the NBC that Harris was picked from a group of Canadian campers to go on the European tour.

Harris found out she had been chosen to go on the tour at the end of 2005. She also found out it was going to cost her \$4,000, plus spending money.

The energetic and driven Harris decided that she'd look to her tiny town for help and wrote a letter to local service groups and other organizations asking for financial aide.

"I heard back from a lot of organizations right away," she says. "I was surprised with how much sup-



Claire Harris, 16, recently got back from a two-week basketball camp that took her to Ireland and Wales. The experience not only gave her new basketball skills, but also some life lessons.

port I got."

Over half a dozen businesses and service clubs in the Harrow area got back to Harris and their help totaled almost \$1,000. The rest of the money came from family and friends.

Despite the cost of the tour and the effort it took to fundraise, Harris' father, Chris, says that the experience was worth it.

"You can't go wrong with it even though it cost a lot of money," Chris Harris

said. "It's all about the experience, and I think that's the biggest thing. She had such an awesome time. I don't think she wanted to come home."

The 16-year-old basketball veteran's start in the sport was determined more by genetics than skill. Harris laughs when she tells the story about how she was chosen for her school's basketball team in the fifth grade purely because of her height. Her talent in basket-

ball developed later, she said.

"I was in Grade 5 when I first started," Harris said. "I was the giant of the grade. I was just so tall. So my friends said 'Try out for the basketball team.' And my coach said, 'I'm going to put you on the team, you're tall so I can work with you.' But I only scored one basket that whole year. I wasn't very good. But she worked with me and she helped out a lot."

Chris Harris said the family sent Claire on the trip to Ireland and Wales with no worries.

"She's great at meeting people. I don't think that, at her age, I could fly across the world and hang out with a bunch of people I'd never met," Chris Harris said.

"I think I grew and I learned some new skills," Harris said about her trip. "It really helped personally."

Harris' current focus is enjoying the summer before school begins. Aside from

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basketball, she plays volleyball and sits on her school's student council, but basketball is by far her favourite.

"If I can play university

basketball, I'd really like to do that," she said. "If not, I'll probably study to be an athletic therapist. I'll try to get into coaching too."

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