



ABOVE: Ariel Braker poses for the 2013-2014 Notre Dame Fighting Irish women's basketball team poster.



ABOVE: Braker plays against the Maryland Terrapins women's basketball team in the Final Four at Bridgestone Arena in Nashville, Tennessee on April 6, 2014. The Fighting Irish won 87-61.

Former NCAA basketball player returns as assistant coach for the girls basketball team

By Sonny Mulpuri & Trevor Mieczkowski
STAFF REPORTERS

It has been six years since 2010 alumna Ariel Braker graduated. In that time, she's received her degree from the University of Notre Dame, where she played basketball for the Fighting Irish, and completed a masters in sports administration at Wayne State University. Now she's come home—to be the assistant coach of the girls varsity basketball team.

"I am just giving them all the knowledge I learned, especially coming out of Notre Dame, and when I was a grad student at Wayne, I helped coach their women's team," Braker said. "I think I have a lot of different perspectives from different coaches, and I am trying to bring all that to give the girls information about the game to make them better players, essentially."

Braker hopes to help other girls achieve their dreams, just as she was able to reach hers while playing basketball at Notre Dame.

She aspired to play at the college level since she was in fourth grade, always knowing that Notre Dame was her top choice.

"It was just awesome being able to go to that go to that school and being able to fulfill the dream of playing basketball there," Braker said.

After graduating from Notre Dame and Wayne State, Braker decided to come back to her roots and coach here.

Senior Lauren Lesha hopes to learn all she can from Braker before the season ends. She remembers attending games when she was in middle school and seeing Braker as one of the hardest working players on the court.

"She has, obviously, played at a very high level, and she can help us with the little form and technique things," Lesha said.

The younger players will have a couple more years to learn what they can with Braker. Freshmen Evelyn Zacharias didn't know Braker personally before this season, but had heard of all of her accomplishments in her career here and leading the 2008 team to North's first and only state championship in girls basketball.

"We have learned that communication is one of the key components to winning a basketball game. Ariel's coaching is straight to the point and clear to follow,"

Zacharias said. "She is very committed to teaching us what we need to learn, and she makes sure we do whatever we need to do until we get it right."

Coach Gary Bennett has stressed the team coming together throughout the season, especially for when playoffs come around.

"I think that she's going to be able to contribute some of the stuff she has experienced and share that with the girls, and I think that's one of the big things she'll bring to us," Bennett said.

Bennett has seen Braker grow as a player since her freshmen year and sees it in the suggestions she gives or the type of drills and plays she has molded into the system after her time at Notre Dame.

He has noticed that Braker has become a more mature basketball player, and she has a much better understanding of the game.

"You can really see that she understands all the counter-moves to make to whatever the defense does," Bennett said. "I think she has a really deep understanding of basketball, deeper than what she had when she was a player."

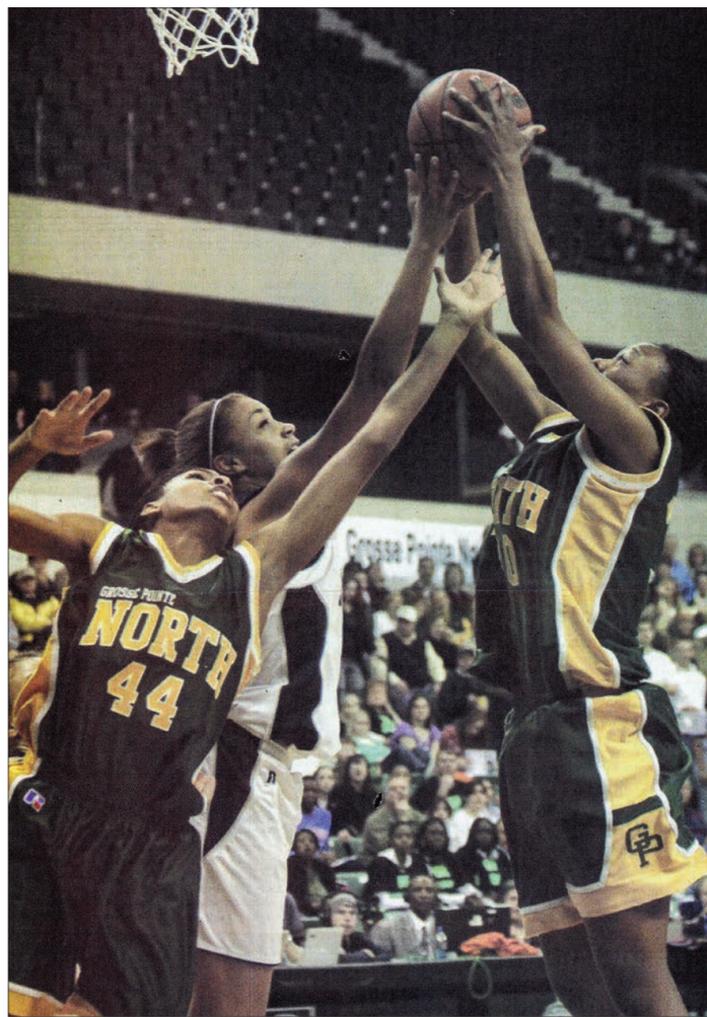
Braker's lasting love for the game is the reason she has experienced success in her basketball career and why she decided to come back and pass on her knowledge to more girls.

"I tried everything I could to just be around the game and do anything I could to just learn more about it, and when Mr. Bennett gave me the opportunity, I jumped on it," Braker said.

Bennett said that he has a ton of respect for Braker not just as a basketball player, but also as a person. He loves to be around her and thinks she can serve as a good role model for his team.

He understands the experience she has under her belt will bring more insight into the program, give more confidence to his players and help them slow down the game in big situations.

"I think she understood that when she was a player here, and my values haven't changed at all, so I don't sit down and try to teach her anything," Bennett said. "I actually expect to learn more from Ariel than she does from me. That is how I view it."



ABOVE: During the 2008 Class A State Championship game, then sophomore Ariel Braker, left, battled for the ball against an East Lansing High School player.



Boys swim team hosts invitational

By Lauren Sexton
MULTIMEDIA EDITOR

LEFT: Junior Paul Rakowicz dove to begin the 400 meter relay.
BELOW LEFT: Junior Ben Sliwinski finishes the 50 free in fourth place.
BELOW: Freshman Warren Galloway swims the 100-yard breaststroke. Galloway finished the race with a time of 1:34.
FAR BELOW: Class of 2015 alumnus Matt Stander caps Rakowicz before his race.

