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Heil Twins To Play In NCAA Tourney

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By Andrew Cato, ShowMe Times Sports

When one thinks back on great players in the history of Lady Bearcat Basketball, several names come to mind: Michaela Scott, Leah Tippen, Amy & Stephanie Rose, Rachel Blunt, and Taylor Nelson. Two other names could arguably be added to that list: Katelyn & Cathryn Heil.

Katelyn and Cathryn, both 20, are the twin daughters of Dan and Connie Heil, and are 2009 graduates of Dexter High School. Both girls are also currently playing basketball at Missouri University of Science and Technology (formerly University of Missouri at Rolla).

Both were excellent student-athletes during their time at DHS. Both girls were on the honor roll all four years of high school, as well as members of Dexter Honor Society. Cathryn was top ten percent all four years, with Katelyn making the list her senior year.

Cathryn was a three-time All-Conference & All-Region, two-time All-District, and All-State selection in volleyball, as well as a state-qualifier in high jump her senior year. Katelyn was named First Team All-Conference, All-District, All-Region, and All-State in basketball during her junior and senior seasons, went to state in tennis doubles and sectionals in the 4X100 meter relay her junior year.

The Heil family moved to Dexter from Savannah, Mo. the summer before the girls were to start eighth grade.

“The toughest thing was moving to a new place and not knowing anybody,” Katelyn said. “Basketball wise, it was tough because its hard to find your niche in a team that has already been playing together for that long.”

“The girls were amazing,” Cathryn added. “Before we knew it, it was like we had been on the team all along. It also helped a ton that we got involved with each other off the court. I made great friends through basketball, and I contribute a lot of our successes to those friendships.”

After great high school careers, and capping of a 28-2 senior season with a trip to state, the girls had to make a decision on where they would play college ball. Both received attention from Missouri S&T and Missouri Southern State University. Cathryn was recruited by Maryville University and Missouri Western State University, with Katelyn receiving letters from Tennessee State and West Point. Cathryn credited S&T’s academics and Rolla’s hometown feel as deciding factors for her.

“They [S&T] have a great program with a lot of girls that we’ve played against and with a different times,” Cathryn commented. “Also, great academics - the best mix of athletics and academics for me. Rolla was also a perfect fit. It's a small town with a hometown feel.”

Katelyn also noted the university’s size as an important point for her.

“It fits me well as a person,” Katelyn said. “It wasn’t so big that I’d feel lost, but it’s big enough for me to grow.”

Missouri S&T head basketball coach Alan Eads attributed the twins’ athletic ability and size as reasons the school pursued the twins.

“We had seen them in some summer shootouts between their junior and senior years,” Eads said. “We were needing three players, especially at the wing and guard position. I liked their athletic ability and size, as well as their ability to score, especially Katelyn.”

The girls struggled slightly during their first college practices, but Eads said that it was typical of freshman.

“They both had a rough transition into the college game,” Eads continued. “It took a while for them to adjust to the increased tempo and physicality from high school to college, but it's common for freshman to go through that.”

According to Eads, both girls have also had significant injuries during their first two years at Missouri S&T.

“Katelyn missed seven or eight games early this season with a severe high ankle sprain,” Eades said, “but she’s been back since January. Cathryn was injured for most of her freshman season, so this is her first year as a full-time player.”

Both girls have been getting playing time this season, and are expected to get more next year.

“Katelyn has been starting off and on since January,” Eads said. “She also could be an everyday starter next year. It all depends on how much work she puts in this summer with conditioning - she’ll play a lot, regardless of whether she starts or not.”

“Cathryn, having missed most of her freshman season due to injury, is a little behind Katelyn,” Eads continued. “It might be a little tougher for her to start next year, as they both play the same position, but she should still play quite a bit. She’s a good defensive player with great athletic talent.”

Despite facing early adversity from injuries, the twins’ hard work has paid off. The Lady Miners have been selected for the NCAA Division II Tournament this season. It is the Lady Miners’ third trip in school history, second trip in four years, and first time for the Heil twins.

“This is huge,” Katelyn said. “The teams selected are the best of the best. Hopefully we can keep proving how good we are.”

“Its a huge honor,” Cathryn added. “The hard work that we’ve put in all year - the long road trips and many hours away from home and school - is paying off. It's worth it to see our dream of reaching the NCAA Tournament come true. The excitement on campus about our season has been fun to experience, too.”

The Lady Miners have put together quite the impressive season, going into the tournament with a 20-7 record. S&T will be in the Midwest Regional, held in Houghton Mich., and are seeded sixth. Third-seeded Wisconsin-Parkside will face off against S&T

Friday (March 11) at 11:00 a.m. The game is a rematch of a contest from mid-January, where S&T lost in triple overtime, 80-77.

“We’re playing Wisconsin-Parkside on Friday,” Eads said. “It was a triple-overtime loss for us back in January, but it was a very close, very good game. Hopefully we’ll be able to get some revenge.”

Despite the large time commitment involved in any college sports, Eads noted that both girls have kept their grades up, as well as keeping a good head on their shoulders.

“They’re both just great kids,” Eads commented. “They are both 3.8-plus GPA kids and are very involved on campus. They are very well-liked, good teammates. They’d do anything for the team, and do anything to win. They both have that winner’s mentality.”

Make sure to stay tuned to the *ShowMe Times* for updates on both of these incredible young ladies as their careers progress, as well as tournament updates from the NCAA Division II Tournament!

Photo provided by Missouri S&T Sports Information.

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