

Basketball – Oklahoma lures Portobello hoopsters

In different suburbs of Tulsa, Oklahoma, USA live two of the finest female basketball players who have ever pulled on a Scottish international shirt, writes Sandy Sutherland.

One of them, Rose Anderson, could rightly claim to be the greatest ever having been the only Scot to play in the 2012 London Olympics when Great Britain so nearly beat the eventual silver medallists France.

A decade before that, Nicky Emblem, a former Scottish javelin champion who came close to winning a medal for Scotland in the Commonwealth Games, was also knocking on the door of becoming the first Scots basketball player to reach the Women's NBA professional league in the USA.

Both girls had gone to Portobello High School, the nursery for so many young players and both had gone on to play for the City of Edinburgh Kool Kats all-conquering club team as well.

Both had also won scholarships to colleges in Oklahoma and Emblem later returned there to take up coaching posts in both basketball and football. Both exiles are now happily married there.

Enter Celina Eisenhardt, a name which does not sound particularly Edinburgh or Scottish but which, if she continues to progress as she has done in the last five years, may well emulate her more famous alumna.

She was awarded a basketball scholarship to Murray State Junior College in Oklahoma, where she flew last week to to begin a two year stay. How appropriate is it therefore that Celina is a big fan of Rose.

She said: "Rose is my hero. I remember her playing for Great Britain against Canada at Meadowbank in a warm-up game for the 2012 Olympics when I was just starting to come to the Kats training."

"She was such a strong player, but the thing I remember most was her shoes, " confessed Celina.

"I wanted them so bad as they were bright red and had lower tops and I still had high tops then. I wanted to play like Rose."

Celina who is bi-lingual – both her parents are German – is originally from Hamburg but has spent the last two years studying and developing her basketball at Myerscough College near Lancaster.

This follows impressive performances for the Kats junior team – who won successive Scottish Cup Finals at Oriam – and the Scottish under-18 National team.

Murray State coach Steve Lowe must have been sufficiently impressed by the tapes he saw of Celina's performances in the English leagues to offer her a two-year deal in Tishomingo.

Celina is quick to praise Edinburgh Kats full-time professional coach Craig Nicol for much of her improvement, especially in terms of strength and fitness, which prepared her for Myerscough.

And Myerscough she feels has prepared her well for Murray State and she added: "Myerscough is set up like a small US College."

Library picture of youngsters enjoying the game by Jane Barlow