

Guardedly optimistic

Boeren's back in the Bridgewater lineup

by Mike Ashley

SARAH BOEREN CAN GIVE her college basketball career a thumbs-up these days, but it hasn't always been that way for the Botetourt County native.

Recently, she literally couldn't give the thumbs-up sign.

Boeren finally moved into the starting lineup at Bridgewater this season as a senior but dislocated her left thumb in the season opener. She missed the next six contests before returning to the team earlier this month.

"I finally worked my way up to the starting point guard position and I dislocated my thumb the first game," Boeren says. "That kind of stunk."

But Boeren's Bridgewater experience has mostly been much more aromatic. The 5-foot-5 Lord Botetourt High School product transferred there in 2009, after one year at Concord, and she has been a fixture in the rotation of some pretty good Eagles teams the last couple of years.

Now, after sitting for most of the pre-Christmas schedule, she's ready to get her hands back on the ball and run the offense. She played 23 minutes in that opening win at Averett, scoring three points and dishing out three assists before she stuck her hand in to make a steal and suddenly realized her thumb wasn't connected to the rest of her like it used to be.

"It was really disappointing because this is my senior year," says Boeren, dislocated from the spot she had worked so hard to earn. "At the same time I looked at it as an opportunity to work with some of the younger kids. I wanted to help motivate them and be an encourager on the bench."

That role wouldn't be enough for most seniors, but Boeren's not just any athlete. Bridgewater coach **Jean Willi**, who recently picked up her 300th career win, loves Boeren's bent as a team-first player.

"She has always been a very vocal, positive leader, whether on

the floor or on the bench," says Willi. "To her credit, she became the best cheerleader on the bench while she was injured. She didn't sit there and feel sorry for herself."

The Eagles, despite a roster that includes seven freshmen, were 4-3

headed into January, and the team will get a boost from Boeren, who has experience beyond what many of her teammates can imagine. Her freshman season at Concord was an eye-opening experience and one that would have brought tears to the eyes of a lesser person.

"My dream was always to play college basketball, but a lot of college freshmen don't realize the pressure that is put upon you," she says. "That's not really what you expect as a kid. By the end of our season, I wasn't having fun and academically I wasn't challenged, so I wanted to transfer."

Boeren had considered Bridgewater out of Lord Botetourt but the Eagles, a Division III ODAC squad, couldn't match the money that Concord could offer as a Division II program. But Boeren, who has always seen the whole floor well, remembered the Eagles' interest and transferred. She played in 24 games that first season, averaging 2.0 points and 1.3 rebounds for a 17-9 squad.

Last season, splitting point guard duties with Luray native **Jenny Logan**, she chipped in 2.9

points and 1.7 assists as Bridgewater went 22-4.

"I've always been a point guard," she says with a laugh. "I've never been tall enough to play anywhere else. But I wouldn't want to play any other position. I feel like I'm well-suited for the position. I feel like I'm a leader and a communicator. I like being in charge."

Willi agrees.

"She has really come into her own this year," says the coach. "We like the pace she creates, she's a floor general out there, and I think she finally felt very comfortable. To have her break the thumb, it really broke my heart. She had worked so hard to get where she was. She's been cleared and hopefully is ready to go."

Boeren never aspired to be a big scorer, even back when she was helping lead Lord Botetourt to three district titles and two berths in the state Final Four. She averaged 10.4 ppg as a senior, and earned honorable mention all-state honors for coach **Chuck Pound**.



Boeren dislocated her left thumb in this season's first game and was out of action for six weeks



Boeren averaged 10.4 ppg her senior year at Lord Botetourt, earning honorable mention all-state honors

"I see the floor really well," she says. "I can dribble through a press and pass to my teammates. I'd rather get an assist than score, but I think my shot has improved. If I'm left open I'm going to knock that shot down. I

like to think of myself as a secret weapon, coming off the bench or starting. It doesn't matter as long as I get to play."

Boeren is a team captain this year, and while she has helped the Eagles soar to a lot of wins, she lists her career highlight as just "getting the opportunity to play," largely because she understands that's not a given, even for a talented player.

"I know what it feels like when you're not playing and not getting support," she says. "The difference when you're playing for a really good coach and with really good teammates means so much. I don't take it for granted like I used to."

A physical education major, Boeren doesn't take anything for granted in that field, either. She is on pace to graduate summa cum laude, and should be a prime candidate for ODAC basketball's top academic award. Moreover, she now hopes to someday get her master's degree in adaptive physical education and someday work with challenged children.

"I took a class in adaptive physical education this fall and I re-

Boeren

From Page 13

ally loved working with kids with disabilities,” Boeren says. “It has become one of my new passions.”

Short term, she would like to land a job as an elementary school PE teacher in the Roanoke area after graduation this spring. She already has an offer from Pound to help out at Lord Botetourt as a volunteer coach. That’s another passion she hopes to pursue, too.

Boeren credits her Botetourt coaches, all the way back to middle school and **Donald Eggleston** and **Keith Spencer** to the high school and Pound and **Chad Conner**, with their support, encouragement and laying a solid base in the game’s fundamentals. “That’s what really helped me become a successful college basketball player,” she says.

Leave it to the unselfish point guard to spread the credit around. And Boeren’s back in action now,



Boeren hopes to become an elementary school PE teacher and a high school coach

ready to show off her handiwork on the court, and finish her career with a big thumbs-up. ●