

# Stanford star considered the best

■ **TOP PLAYER:** Cardinal forward Kate Starbird seeks a national title in final season

By Mark McTyre  
Sports Editor

Is she the best player ever to play women's basketball?

Quite possibly. She has nearly every credential to fit the billing.

In just over a year, Stanford senior Kate Starbird has been honored with 15 awards including Co-Pacific-10 Conference Player of the Year, the NCAA West Regional Most Outstanding Player Award, a Kodak First Team All-American selection and a 1995-96 Naismith Player of the Year Award finalist. In her three years, Starbird has collected a total of 21 honors.

What makes her so good?

"We have a lot of players who are considered very versatile," said Amy Tucker, Stanford assistant coach, "and Kate Starbird leads that group. Kate was not only our leading scorer last year, she was also our flashiest player."

Since becoming a starter for the Cardinal at the beginning of her sophomore season, the 6-foot-2

guard/forward has averaged 18 points, 4.4 rebounds and 3.8 assists per game. Starbird's ability to play either the shooting guard or small forward position, and her knowledge of the game, are the aspects her coaches most admire.

"Kate can play either wing position for us," Tucker said. "She's a good passer for her size and goes to the basket very well. I think she's a heady player — somehow she finds a way to score."

With the popularity of women's basketball on the rise across the country, Starbird's talents haven't only been noticed by coaches and award selection committees. One sportscaster called her the "Michael Jordan" of women's basketball. Starbird says she is not quite sure how to respond to the high praise she has received.

"It's flattering and a little bit scaring at the same time," Starbird said. "I really never thought I'd end up where I am. I guess I came around at the right time for this sport."

While she keeps adding to her list of personal achievements this year, including once again being named a Naismith Award candi-

date, Starbird's main goal is to help her team win a NCAA national title.

Prior to her arrival at Stanford, the Cardinal had won two of the last four titles, but since has not been able to return to the championship game. During the Starbird era, Stanford has been to the Round of Eight and two Final Fours.

"Definitely, this year is very important to us four seniors," Starbird said. "We've been to the Final Four and lost — we don't want to do that again. We're gunning for the title."

Starbird is quick to mention, however, that for her team to go beyond the Final Four it must concentrate on the Pac-10 schedule.

"We're going to take this Pac-10 seriously," Starbird said, "everybody is a threat. We have to come out strong each night because the minute we let down someone will beat us."

Last season, the Cardinal won all 18 of its conference games, so teams will look to knock mighty Stanford from its high post. Starbird only hopes it won't happen in post-season play.

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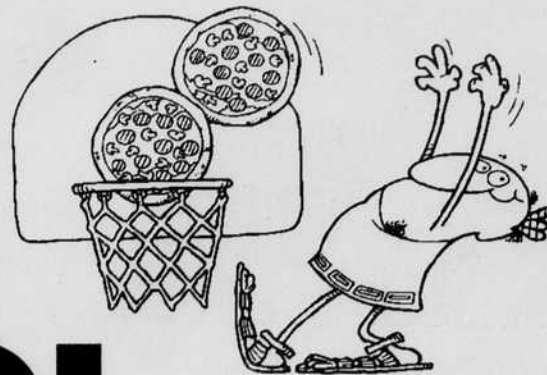
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