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Althoff's Harms will play for Austin Peay

6-foot-8 senior drew attention playing AAU ball in summer

BY NORM SANDERS
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In a slumping economy, Althoff High senior basketball player Joe Harms found a way to increase his recruiting stock with a solid summer season.

"Joe is probably the only piece of real estate that increased its value around our area this year," Althoff coach Greg Leib said after the 6-foot-8, 215-pound forward gave a verbal commitment to play for Division I Austin Peay State University in Clarksville, Tenn.

"I think it's a matter of confidence. There were times last year where he did some great things for us, and I think he built on that and learned from that. He took those experiences and ran with them a little bit."

Earlier this year, Edwardsville player Will Triggs also committed to Austin Peay. The Governors' squad already includes former Edwardsville player Anthony Campbell, a 6-foot-6 sophomore.

Triggs and Harms were teammates over the summer on the St. Louis-based RameyBasketball.com AAU team. The team won its pool at a major tournament in Las Vegas, helping Harms attract more attention.

"We beat some really good teams out there," said Harms, whose parents also sent out game film to number of colleges.

He gave his commitment after taking an official visit to Austin Peay last weekend.

Harms chose Austin Peay from a list of interested schools that included Air Force, Army, Tennessee-Martin, Eastern Kentucky, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, McKendree, Chicago, Washington University and Illinois Wesleyan.

He is Althoff's first Division I basketball recruit since former St. Louis University standout Kevin Lisch, who is now playing professional basketball in Australia for the Perth Wildcats.

Harms, who scored a 30 on his ACT exam, said Austin Peay provided the right mix of challenging basketball and academics.

"It was really the balance they had between athletics and academics," he said. "I wanted to go somewhere I could play and somewhere I wouldn't have to compromise my academics. Their physics program was unbelievable."

That's right, a Division I basketball recruit talking about majoring in physics.

"I really wanted to do medicine, so I was looking at things that would set me apart as far as med school admissions go," Harms said. "We have a good physics teacher at Althoff and she really helped spark an interest there for me."

Harms has gained 17 pounds thanks to increased weight room work. He also has expanded his game to include a jump shot away from the basket.

"That's helped him a great deal," Leib said. "As long as he is, he creates some difficult matchups on the block because he can shoot over people. He also passes the ball well, so if you double him he can find the open person."

Much of the weight work came during a stretch last spring when Harms was rehabilitating a minor knee injury.

"I wasn't happy at the time, but looking back it was a good thing," Harms said. "That allowed me to lift every single day and I got a lot stronger."

Althoff reached the Class 3A Springfield Super-Sectional last season before losing to eventual state champion Champaign Centennial.

On a balanced 22-8 team that had only one player averaging in double figures last year (Carson Sonnenberg's 14 points per game), Harms averaged 5.5 points. He also had nine blocked shots.

Althoff's top six players from the end of last season return, including Sonnenberg, Alex Mumphard, Devin Griffin, Harms, Sam Hanger and Ed Fink.

The Crusaders also are part of the Coaches vs. Cancer shootout on Jan. 16 at St. Louis University's Chaifetz Arena. Althoff will play Mary Institute-Country Day School from St. Louis at 11:30 a.m.

Edwardsville takes on St. Charles (Mo.) West at 3 p.m., while Central takes on McCluer at 6 p.m.

Other games include Lindbergh (Mo.) vs. Fox at 10 a.m.; Ramsey (Ala.) vs. Webster Groves (Mo.) at 1 p.m.; Glenbrook North vs. St. Louis U. High at 4:30 p.m.; and Hazelwood (Mo.) Central vs. Memphis (Tenn.) Melrose at 7:30 p.m.

Austin Peay was 19-14 last season, losing to Bradley in the NIT. Once Southern Illinois University Edwardsville is cleared for full membership in the Ohio Valley Conference, it will give Harms his closest college "home" game.

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