GOODWILL GAMES

Smith heads OSU contingent

She’s only college player on U.S. women’s basketball team

By Derek Monroe
Dispatch Sports Reporter

Katie Smith will be keeping select company the next few weeks.

The junior All-American forward for the Ohio State women’s basketball team is the only college player to earn a spot on the U.S. squad competing in the Goodwill Games, Saturday through Aug. 7 in St. Petersburg, Russia.

The Goodwill Games are expected to attract 2,000 athletes, from more than 50 nations, competing in 24 sports.

“I’m excited about it,” Smith said. “It gives me an opportunity to play with some people that you watched or heard about while you were growing up.”

Also on the USA’s 12-player roster are Sheryl Swoopes, the former Texas Tech All-American and national player of the year; Lisa Leslie, the 1994 player of the year out of Southern Cal, Dawn Staley, a former Virginia All-American; Jennifer Azzi, a former Stanford star; and Shanda Berry, an ex-Iowa standout.

OSU coach Nancy Darsch will serve on the coaching staff headed by Stanford’s Tara VanDerveer.

“It’s definitely a nice support system when you know there’s somebody you can talk to,” Smith said. “It also helps to know that they know and understand what I can do and what tendencies I have on the court.”

Darsch said she was not surprised that Smith survived the cuts during tryouts.

“There’s not too many things that Katie does that surprise me anymore,” Darsch said. “But I did think that she responded very well, especially in Colorado (at the USA training facility), to the caliber and to the tempo of the practices and sessions.

“I think she did a very good job of responding to what the coaches asked her to do. She raised her game up another couple of notches, and I wouldn’t be surprised if she’s not competing for a starting position. ... She makes things happen offensively. She plays good defense. She can post up. She can shoot the three. She can drive and she can run the floor in transition.”

Smith says being the only college player isn’t intimidating, but an honor and an achievement.

“The players and the coaches have really been supportive and taken me under their wing,” she said. “They call me rookie, but they support me in what I do because they know I’m out there working hard and trying to help out.”

Other OSU athletes participating in the Goodwill Games are gymnasts Drew Durbin, Blaine Wilson and Kip Simons. OSU coach Peter Kormann will head the gymnastics coaching staff.