Dutch Guard Brings High Basketball IQ to Farmville

Vennema adds international experience to LU basketball

Nick Lewis

A quick glance at the women’s basketball roster had mostly familiar faces but had a couple of new ones vacated by graduated seniors. Both new players are, lanky, quiet and tall. Longwood’s biggest weakness last season was they had a smaller team, so bringing in taller players will even out the height disadvantage.

Freshman Milou Vennema has an interesting background and has experience on an international stage. The 5’11” guard from Groningen, Netherlands which is on the north eastern tip of the country and played for the U20 National Team this past summer where she earned a bronze medal at the European Championships. Vennema started training with the U20 team during the months leading up to the tournament.

When talking about the balance of practice and school Vennema said, “It was really busy because I did my exams that year it was a lot, but we just practiced. We already know the team that we practice with since U14 but we had a new coach…We had a really athletic team so we just built up and played five out and then we went to the European Championship [tournament].”

“We came to the quarterfinals we had to play Latvia and we won. It gives you a boost because you’re in the top eight so we’re like, ‘no top eight we want to get a medal,’ so we played Italy for the medal game and we won[bronze].”

A reserved person, Vennema quietly said national play requires you to, “work your ass off.” To make the team, Vennema explained that it was more common for players from the west and south of Netherlands to be on the roster than players from the Groningen area.

 Vennema was one of two players on the team from the north. Vennema felt as an outsider so she had to work extra hard to prove to the coach she belonged on the national team.

Vennema explained the competition in the other areas in the country isn’t as lax as it is in the north. Vennema said, “I worked really hard and showed myself and just be able to connect with the team and with the coach.”

One of the weapons she brings to the table for Longwood, besides her height, is her basketball IQ which she believes comes from playing other national teams because international play is more tactical. Her Head Coach Rebecca Tillett agrees and said, “The basketball intelligence that she displays on the floor it’s really noticeable when you watch her play.”

When Vennema arrived at Longwood, she already had a couple things in mind that she wanted to improve over the course of the season to be better for her national team. “I want to improve my shooting, but I need to be more consistent with my shot so I’m working with Coach [Jessica Olmstead] Olms to work on my shot and my footwork and I just hope I can get stronger,” said Vennema.

There are some advantages of bringing in international players like Vennema who has experience on the world stage. When talking about these advantages, Assistant Coach and Director of Recruiting Tiffany Sardin said, “They’ve experienced that pro level, they’ve played against some of the best throughout the world, not just in their hometown. They’re highly skilled, tremendous basketball IQ level, and just ready to compete at all times. They come in with minimum distractions, in which they come here with a purpose and that’s ready to play and have an impact.”

Continuing to talk about Vennema Sardin said, “She comes from a strong basketball family [ mother played for the Dutch national team], she’s very personable, and extremely mature for her age, and has a great knowledge for basketball. The vision she shared with us was along the same vision that we’re sharing and we all want to be in this together. We thought Milou was someone who fit what we’re looking for and we’re very excited that she’s here and she chose to come here.”

One of the main reason Vennema chose Longwood was because of the vision she shared with the coaches. Vennema said, “The way they like to play, I like to play and just the way Coach Tillett told me about her experiences and just the way she is I really like it.”

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