

American game not totally foreign

UE's Japanese guard adjusting to size difference

By RYAN REYNOLDS

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She's yet to play a minute in a Lady Aces uniform, but University of Evansville freshman Shinko Ono already is receiving the star treatment.

Ono was the most popular UE women's basketball player at Thursday's media day as reporters lined up to talk to the native of Nagasaki, Japan. Her biggest television spot, though, was filmed earlier in the week.

A crew from ESPN's Japan affiliate followed Ono around the university on Monday, putting together a piece to be televised in her homeland.

"They wanted to film me at school and playing basketball," Ono said. "They think it's nice that I'm here for an NCAA school."

UE head coach Kathi Bennett said ESPN's interest may be for a different reason.

"She might be the first female Japanese basketball player to get a Division I scholarship," she said.

Bennett first encountered Ono when she was coaching Wisconsin-Oshkosh, a team she guided to the 1996 Division III national championship. The summer before its title run, the school hosted a clinic for Japanese teams. It was during that camp that Ono caught Bennett's eye.

■ UE's coach expects new defensive attitude to make a difference this season.

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"She saw the floor amazingly well," Bennett said. "She was a strong passer, and I told her I'd love to have her play for me someday."

Three years later, Ono could be the starting point guard for a Division I school.

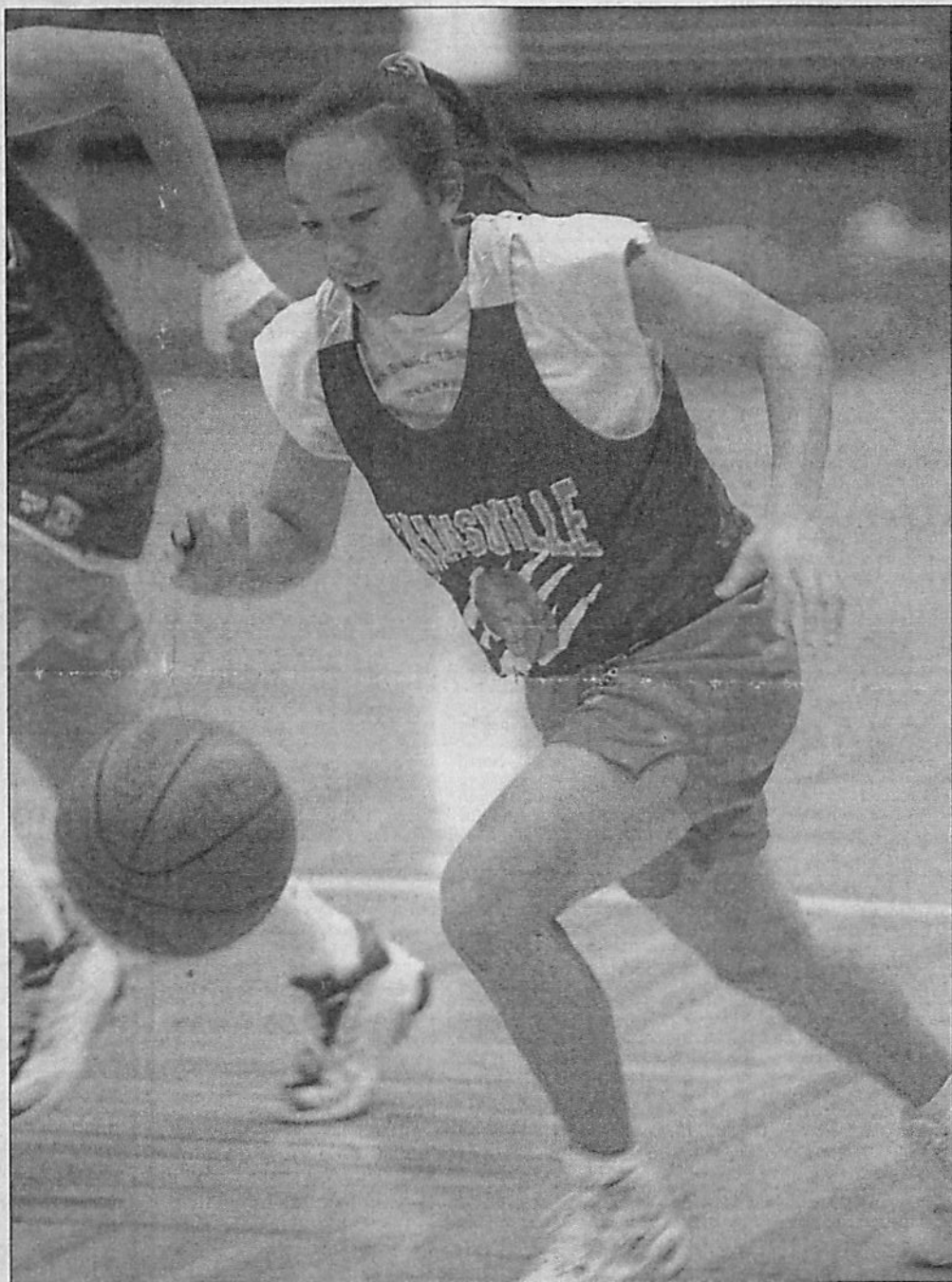
"I'm here because of coach Bennett," the 5-foot-4 Ono said. "Her coach and my coach from high school think alike. I like her way of teaching the game."

Ono guided her Kakumei High School team to a state title and a runner-up performance in Japan's national high school finals.

"When Coach Bennett came to Evansville, she still wanted to recruit me," Ono said. "I still wanted to play for her."

The adjustment from a speed- and passing-oriented Japanese style to an American brand of game which features screening and strength hasn't been easy for Ono.

"The girls here are so powerful," Ono said, searching the Roberts Stadium floor for a good example and finding 6-foot-1 teammate Shyla McKibbons. "Like Shyla. Shyla's so tall and so powerful. We don't have that in Japan."



ABOVE: Shinko Ono, a freshman from Nagasaki, Japan, is in the running for UE's point guard spot. LEFT: Aces coach Kathi Bennett and senior Abby Krause talked strategy during a break in the team's workout on Thursday at Roberts Stadium.

JIM MERITHEW / The Courier

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