

Hartwick signs with Stetson

Midfielder joins Granite City grad Gavilsky at D-I school

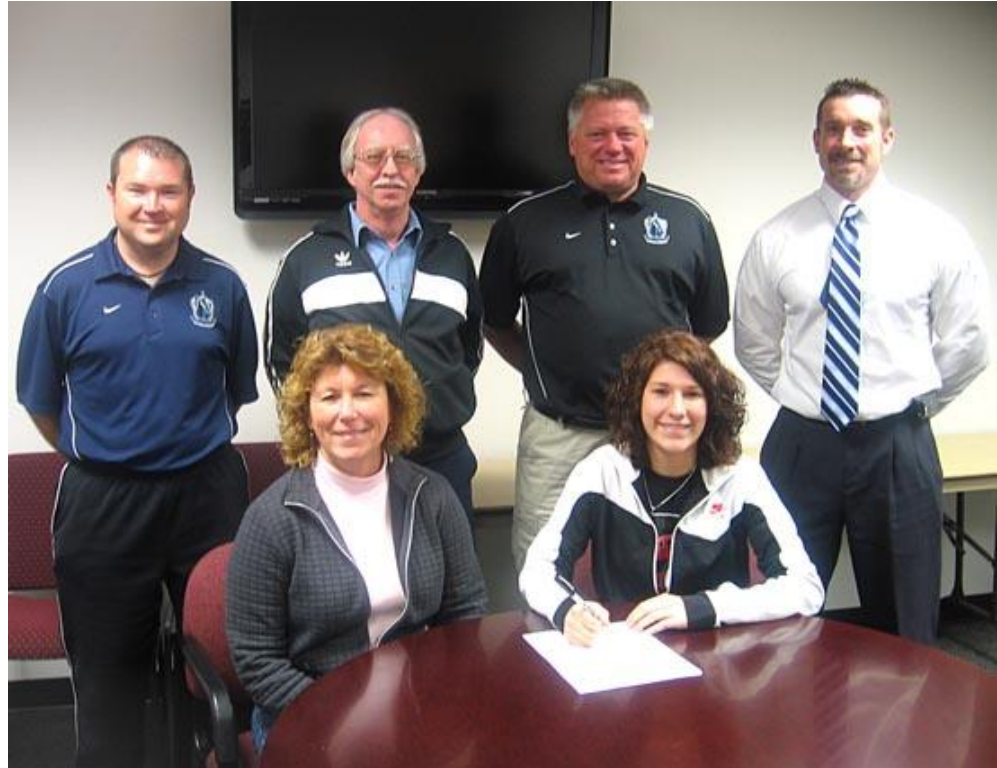
By **Theo Tate**

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For the last two years, Tessa Gavilsky was the only Granite City player on the Stetson University women's soccer team.

Next year, Gavilsky will have company.

On Wednesday, Granite City senior Kaisi Hartwick signed a letter of intent to play soccer for the NCAA Division I school in De Land, Fla. Stetson plays in the Atlantic Sun Conference and finished 7-10-2 last fall.



THEO TATE PHOTO Granite City senior Kaisi Hartwick signs a letter of intent to play soccer for Stetson University next year. Front row (from left) Sandie Dietz and Kaisi Hartwick (back row) Metro United coach Mitch Bohnak, Granite City coach Gene Briggs, Metro United coach Dale Schilly and Granite City athletic director Brian Harshany.

"I'm really excited because Tessa is there and she's been a friend of my sister (Alex) forever," Hartwick said. "They have a really good team and hopefully, in years to come, I'll help out the team."

Hartwick is one of three Granite City players who will continue their soccer careers in college next year. Seniors Carlee Luehmann and Hilary Bell plan to play at McKendree University.

"I think the important thing is Kaisi is satisfied and happy with her choice," Granite City coach Gene Briggs said. "She's got a lot of goals set for herself in the future and I think Stetson is going to help her achieve those goals."

Hartwick will continue a soccer career that began when she was 4.

"I think it's going to be amazing," said Hartwick, whose older sister, Alex, is playing soccer at Eastern Kentucky University. "I'm completely excited. I can't wait to get down there. I'm counting down the days."

Hartwick said she's happy that she will be reunited with Gavilsky, who is a sophomore at Stetson and earned the Atlantic Sun's Most Valuable Player award in November.

"I think it will be good," Hartwick said. "Tessa and I have always played well together and I think we compliment each other well. Together, we're going to be a total threat."

Mitch Bohnak, the director of external affairs at St. Louis Scott Gallagher select soccer program, was Hartwick's coach at Metro United. Bohnak said Hartwick was a valuable member of the program.

"Kaisi was a hard worker in center midfield," Bohnak said. "She was a tough tackler and she was downright ornery. You always need at least one of those players in the center of the park. When she was in U-14, she was a huge part of the team that went undefeated for 27 games and she was a starter in the center midfield. She's always been a special player in that capacity to mix it up in the midfield and make life difficult on the other team's players who play in the center of the park."

Bohnak said he's pleased that Hartwick will continue her soccer career at Stetson.

"For me, it's particularly rewarding because there was a time that she wasn't sure where her soccer career would lead, that she would maybe potentially give up soccer and be frustrated in different moments in her life and she battled through that," Bohnak said. "I am thrilled that Kaisi went on to sign for a Division I university."

Hartwick became interested in Stetson when she visited last year.

"We went to a tournament in Florida with Metro and the coach saw me and contacted me," Hartwick said. "I was not set on going to Stetson. I didn't think I was going to go. But I went on a visit just out of curiosity and I ended up loving it there. It was amazing. I fit in with the team. I thought it would be a perfect move for me to go there. It would be the perfect move academically and athletically."

Hartwick will be playing in her fourth season with the Granite City girls soccer team this spring. Last year, she earned all-Southwestern Conference honors and was named to the Illinois National Soccer Coaches Association of America all-sectional team.

"Kaisi plays in the middle of the field and the team needs a good center to execute and be successful and Kaisi has done that for us for three years," Briggs said. "Obviously, we get the benefit of her play for one more season."