

By Randy Whalen

Fran Frieri wanted to become a football player.

"I actually wanted to play football when I was a kid," Frieri said. "I was a cheerleader and I wanted to get out on the field and dodge people."

Instead, the recent Lockport Township graduate found another sport where she could go out on a big field and dodge people.

Lacrosse.

Now Frieri, who is going to continue her playing career at Notre Dame, was recently named the top girl's lacrosse player.

In the Nation.

On August 1 it was announced that Frieri was awarded the USA TODAY Girls Lacrosse Player of the Year. She emerged from 25 nominations, which were announced on July 7.

Frieri is the first Lockport athlete to win a National Player of the Year award.

"It's an incredible feeling," Frieri said. "I have so much pride just to put our name on the map. It's just incredible to have Lockport represented on a National scale. That's what's important, to represent the school. I love being a Porter and it's a very special place.

"It wasn't me, it was all of them (her teammates) too. We have such an incredible place and I'm so proud to be from Lockport. This gives the team recognition, as we went 22-1 this year. This award never felt like an individual award, it's a team one."

Frieri put her at an incredible 200 goals for this season. Not only did she lead the entire nation by 46 goals in scoring this season, but she also became the first United States girl's lacrosse player to ever have 200 goals in a season. She broke her own national record from last year, which was 191 goals in just 21 games.

With those numbers, did she think she'd win the USA TODAY honor?

No, honestly, it never crossed my mind," Frieri said. "My goal was to be the best leader and give my all for the team. I never thought it was possible."

She scored 154 goals in 17 games as a freshman and finished with 545 goals and 77 assists for 622 career points. Frieri now holds the all-time national four-year varsity record for goals scored by five goals. Sophia Turchetta, who played at Dartmouth, held the record at 540 goals when she played at The Bromfield School in Harvard, Massachusetts.

Turchetta actually scored an all-time record of 654 goals in a six-year varsity career. But that's because Massachusetts allows middle-school athletes to participate on the varsity.

But because of COVID, Frieri missed the entire 2020 season and reached that milestone in just three played seasons. Making it even more incredible.

"It's so exciting," Lockport girls lacrosse coach Claire Moran said. "I'm not surprised. This title is well deserved as she showed us over the last four years and will continue to show us at Notre Dame. I saw her during (the last week of July) and she seemed overjoyed and excited about what is in store for her. I'm so proud of her."

What is it that made Frieri the best in the country?

"Her intelligence of the game is elite and more progressive than other people her age," Moran said. "She knows what the next step needs to be and exactly how to do it. She's also very open to critiques and that allows her to flourish and keep evolving into a better player."

Frieri credited Moran, who became head coach this past season, for stepping in and making the team better than ever.

"Claire helped me a lot," Frieri said. "I love her, what a great addition to our team. When our coach from last year (Grainne Kelly) got a job as an assistant coach at Illinois Wesleyan, Claire came in and just completely transformed the program. She pushed us, set goals, and eased the pain of our season ending."

Moran certainly loved coaching the top high school player in the nation.

"Fran is just awesome," Moran said. "To score over 500 goals and set a national record, and to get 200 this season, to beat her own mark. Plus to do all this in just three years was crazy."

"At our banquet, Fran was named as team MVP and there was no other choice. She does her job but makes everyone around her better. She's a lefty and a leader. She's a fantastic person as well."

Frieri didn't pursue football but instead loved lacrosse from the moment she first played it.

"I started playing in the fifth or sixth grade," Frieri said of playing lacrosse. My parents (Jeff and Lori) found a rec league and that's how I started. The first time I picked up a stick, it felt so natural. I loved it and never wanted to put the stick down.

"My parents drove me an hour and a half to go play in club ball. My love of the game has just grown since then. When COVID happened my siblings and I went out there, playing two-on-two every day, just playing the game and practicing."

Frieri is the oldest of four. She has two brothers, Michael, who is a junior and plays at Benet Academy, and Dominic, who is in seventh grade. Her sister Gianna, is now a sophomore at Lockport and was the second leading scorer (62 goals) for the Porters this past season.

Lockport had an amazing season this past spring, winning 22 straight games before losing the sectional final 18-14 to the Lincoln-Way co-op team.

Now Frieri will be playing at Notre Dame. She decided to go there a while ago and was able to officially commit at the start of her junior year.

"It is truly the best fit," she said of going to Notre Dame. "I'm excited to continue my lacrosse career there. I'm going to major in global affairs and executive leadership. I did a 6-week bridge program there this summer and I'm excited. It's going to be amazing."

While Frieri looks forward to the next four years, she will always remember her roots and can't wait to see what Lockport does in the future too.

"I'm really excited to see what the (Porters) do coming up," she said. "There are a lot of studs on the team who will be back. I will always remember my practices and all my teammates throughout the years."