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## Mia Mastrov follows family footsteps to California

By Jon Kingdon



Mia Mastrov Photo provided

You would be hard pressed to find someone that was able to benefit in any way due to the onset of the coronavirus. Though she would have been willing to cancel the tradeoff, the University of California Women's basketball head coach Charmain Smith was able to get Miramonte senior Mia Mastrov on her team several months earlier than expected.

According to Smith, "Mia's father and I had some conversations early on prior to COVID really being a big deal. When we learned that Mia would not lose a year of eligibility were she to begin her college career in the spring, I knew that we would love to have Mia come early to Cal to get acclimated to our program. That's when I called her dad and he said that I could bring it up with Mia."

Mastrov had committed to attending UC Berkeley her junior year, where her grandfather had played basketball under the great Pete Newell. At the end of December, though, it was not an easy decision for Mastrov with all the uncertainty as to whether there would be a season for any sports this spring. "If we were guaranteed to have a season at Miramonte, it's likely I would have stayed. It was a blind decision as to whether to stay or go on to college early, knowing that at California, I was going to have a good experience and good knowledge for the future."

Mastrov showed great prescience by taking online classes the summer of her junior year to ensure that she would have enough credits to be able to graduate by the end of December. "When I had all my credits to be able to graduate early, I got a call from Coach Smith," Mastrov said. "She knew that I had been planning on being able to graduate early and it all came together from there."

After completing their senior year in high school, it's hard enough for any freshman to be able to make the adjustment to the academics of college and playing Division I basketball. As talented as Mastrov was in high school, being named first team all-Northern California as a sophomore and junior, as a 17-year-old going against 22 and 23-year-old opponents, it's that much harder, but Mastrov was aware of what was to come: "I went in there with the mindset to have an open mind, willing to learn and gather as much information as I could. No one can adjust that quickly to playing college basketball. Initially it was a big adjustment, but I think that now that I have a feel for what it's like, I'll be more prepared for my true freshman year."

Mastrov's success was no surprise to the former head coach at Miramonte who coached Mastrov from her sophomore year. When this reporter interviewed him four years ago in writing the preview story about the Lamorinda basketball teams, Sopak pointed to freshman Mastrov. "Don't write this but she's going to be my next great one," Sopak said. High praise from someone who had coached Sabrina Ionescu.

Smith was confident that Mastrov had the qualities to take on the challenge of college level basketball head on: "Mia is a competitor. She's played at a really high level in high school against top competition and talent at Miramonte and with her club teams. She has that mindset to not be afraid at all. I knew that throwing her into the fire would be something that she would embrace, and it would help her down the road."

By the time Mastrov arrived at Cal, there were only six games left in the season, all of which she played in, starting the last five games. With only a week to acclimate herself to her teammates and the team's system, Mastrov came off the bench against the University of Utah, scoring 20 of the Bears' 51 points. With too little time to learn the team's offensive system, Smith limited what Mastrov needed to know when she was on the court. "We gave Mia a few plays which she was comfortable with. She was willing to embrace any challenge that we threw her way, and it really helped the team to have an additional ball handler and shooter."

Being an unknown commodity does not last long when you lead your team in scoring in your first game. Scouting reports were quickly made to take away what Mastrov did best which was to score. Despite shooting 1 for 16 in the next two games, Mastrov did not allow it to lessen her confidence. "I'm mentally stable on the court and no matter what happens, I've learned that you just have to move on from it. I realized that any shot I was going to get was not going to be wide open and would be contested. It takes adjustment to that when teams know that you're the shooter and obviously they don't want to let you score on them."

Smith appreciated how Mastrov handled these new situations: "Mia's reaction was to try and find a way to adjust to her opponents, figuring out how to counter how she was being defended. She is really poised and doesn't get rattled. She has a game face and stays with it and is extremely resilient."

Those are the things that we talked about for the off-season and what she has been working on."

What could have been a more difficult situation was made that much easier by Mastrov's teammates. "They were all amazing and very welcoming," Mastrov said. "They were all great people on and off the court. Without having them there to help and support me, I wouldn't have been able to get as much of a boost as I did this year."

Mastrov also began her academic career at Berkeley and that was more of a change for her than for most first-year students. "My classes on campus were also more of an adjustment in that I went straight into my college classes without the summer break from high school," Mastrov said. "They were difficult but manageable once I adjusted to it. I'm considering majoring in media studies and business though that could change. It's Berkeley and it doesn't get much better than that."

Mastrov still looks back on her at time playing with Miramonte with some emotion: "I missed being able to play my last year with the graduating seniors like P.K. (Sam), Julia (Miller), and Jordan (Allred), who were my teammates since my freshman and sophomore years. Looking back, I did not realize that the last game that I had played with them as a junior would in the end be my last game for Miramonte."

Looking forward, Mastrov is confident in what she sees soon for Cal basketball: "Coach Smith and the staff are on a really good path. We'll have a much better season with the return of our injured players and our freshmen are now more advanced and COVID will not be as limiting this upcoming season."

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