

Calihan set for Ivy League **(c) Henrietta Post, June 2011.**



Brighton graduate Kate Calihan will play squash for Columbia University beginning in the fall.

Brighton, N.Y. — For many families, Christmas is the backdrop to some of their greatest memories.

Kate Calihan has one particularly fond memory of the holiday, back when she was the seven-years-old. The holiday was where the recent Brighton High School graduate was introduced to the sport of squash.

Eleven years later, Calihan is still grateful to her parents for the squash racquet and balls.

Calihan has become a nationally ranked junior player, travelling to tournaments all over the country. She will play for Columbia University beginning in the fall.

"I just love playing and being with my friends," Calihan said. "Even the practices are fun. In other sports I would find that the practices would drag on but not in squash."

While Calihan's parents gave her the means to get in the sport, her older sister Eliza provided the inspiration to keep playing. Eliza set the example traveling to tournaments at a young age.

The younger sister couldn't wait to follow in the older siblings footsteps and Kate decided to forego tennis for squash. They were training together and a rivalry was brewing on the squash courts at the Genesee Valley Club.

Eliza is currently playing for Harvard.

"I knew I definitely wanted to play in college was when I saw Eliza play (at Harvard)," Kate said. "I could see how much fun she was having with her team. I knew I wanted to play in college after that."

Calihan started working with Kate Guyer, director of racquet and sports at the Genesee Valley Club at six-years-old. The veteran coach quickly spotted her potential talent.

By 10 Calihan was spending her weekends playing in tournaments around the East Coast including New York, Boston and Philadelphia.

Her sophomore year Calihan took first in the Maryland Junior Silver Tournament in Baltimore. The following year she won her bracket in a tournament at Penn and reached the semifinals at another in Harvard.

"Her power is great, and she moves around the court very well," Guyer said. "She has realized it is more of game that you have to be outplaying someone mentally."

Calihan's dedication to the sport paid off as she won the Fred Weymuller Junior Award, the top honor for local amateur players. The award is presented to an athlete who has excelled on and off the court and will continue playing squash in college.

"She has the ability to improvise," said Martin Heath, University of Rochester head coach, who has worked with Calihan for the last four years.

"She has got a natural athleticism and a will to win. Having an older sister that played I think has helped her a lot."

Calihan will join a Columbia program that is still in its infancy under head coach Kelsey Engman. Engman's personality, which Calihan called similar to Guyer's, helped draw Calihan to the school in Manhattan.

The Lions finished 12-6 in their first season at varsity after operating as a club sport for several years. Kate is looking forward to not only helping Columbia when they move into the Ivy League, but knock off defending league champion - Eliza's Harvard Crimson.

"The team has so much passion and the school is committed to the sport," Kate said about Columbia. "I thought it would be fun to be a part of an up and coming program. It's similar to what (the University of Rochester) has done, being built up from nothing."