

Shooting to Win

It didn't take Candace Parker long to rise to the top of the basketball world. At every level she's played, Parker has been the best. She has won championships in high school, college and the Olympics—and her first year in the WNBA was one of the best rookie seasons ever.

Parker was born on April 19, 1986, in St. Louis, Missouri. She grew up in Naperville, Illinois, near Chicago. Her father, Larry, played basketball at the University of Iowa. Her brother Anthony was a great player, too, eventually ending up in the NBA. Her whole family was very involved in sports.

As a young girl, Parker loved sports, too—especially soccer. In eighth grade, she fell in love with basketball. Her parents could hardly get her to stop practicing and come home for dinner!

A High School Star

All that practice paid off. Parker became one of the best high school players around. She led her team to state titles in 2003 and 2004. People noticed how good Parker was. She was named the high school player of the year in her junior and senior seasons.

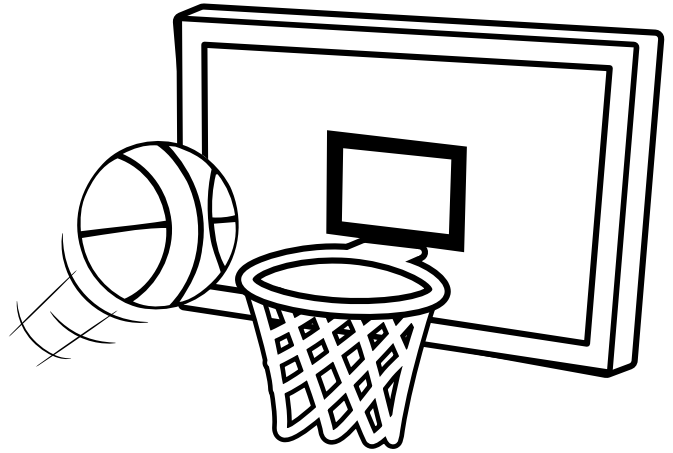
After her senior season, Parker was invited to play in the annual High School All-American Game. Parker signed up for the slam dunk contest. Much to everyone's surprise, she won! Parker was the first woman to win the contest, beating future NBA players Josh Smith and J.R. Smith in the process!

Going to College

After high school, Parker attended the University of Tennessee. She sat out her first year because of a knee injury. When Parker came back the next year, she became an instant star. She won the SEC Rookie of the Year award and led her team, the Lady Vols, to the NCAA Tournament. The team lost to North Carolina, though.

In the next two years, Parker led the Lady Vols to win back-to-back national championships. She was named the national women's college basketball player of the year for both seasons. During her time playing at Tennessee, the team ran up an amazing record of 101 wins and only 10 losses.

Not only did Parker excel on the court, she did great work off the court, as well. She was named an Academic All-American in 2008. The award showed that Parker was working hard in school. As she proudly said, "An athletic career could end at a moment's notice, but a solid education will last a lifetime."



Off to the Pros!

After she graduated in May 2008, Parker helped the U.S. women's national team win gold at the Olympic Games®. That same summer, Parker became the first pick in the 2008 WNBA Draft. She was selected by the Los Angeles Sparks. In her very first professional game, Parker scored 34 points, breaking the league record for scoring in a debut game.

Later that year, Parker became the second WNBA player ever to dunk in a game. Then she did it again in the next game! It was the first time that a WNBA player had dunked in two consecutive games.

By the time the season was over, Parker had taken her place as one of the league's best players. She won the WNBA Most Valuable Player award and the Rookie of the Year award. It was the first time a player had won both awards in the same season! For her record-setting accomplishments, Parker was named the 2008 Associated Press Female Athlete of the Year. Who knows how much Parker will accomplish before her career is over?