

Katia Novi picks SMU partly because of its 'pretty soccer' style



SMU women's soccer coach Chris Petrucelli visited recruit Katia Novi at her Glenview home on Jan. 19, 2017, before she signed with the Mustangs. (Effie Novi/HANDOUT)

By **Heather Rule**
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Katia Novi started playing soccer at age 3. She also dabbled in tennis, basketball, dance, ice skating and baseball on a boys team.

"Soccer just stood out," Novi said. "I had this natural ability. It was just something that I loved to do more than any other sport that I was playing."

That path led her to sign with the SMU women's soccer team on Feb. 4.

"It was pretty amazing to finally sign the paper and make it official and actually know that it was for real," Novi said. "I've been waiting for so long."

Novi, a center midfielder/forward who plays with Sockers FC Chicago in the Elite Clubs National League, signed at her training facility, EFT Sports Performance in Highland Park. The Loyola senior and Glenview resident made her verbal commitment to SMU way back on Oct. 25, 2014, as a sophomore.

Novi, who played for Loyola as a freshman, was contacted by a bunch of colleges looking to recruit her as an eighth-grader. SMU was one of those. It offered her the full-ride scholarship when she visited campus. She was in the coach Chris Petrucelli's office when he told her about the offer.

"And my jaw dropped," Novi said. "I didn't see it coming."

"That is so much money. That is so much potential that they see in me. And it was just incredible to be given that offer as a sophomore as well."

She had just a couple weeks to decide if that was the right fit for her. The time crunch made it a stressful decision, Novi said. She also considered Wisconsin, Northwestern and Princeton.

"But I know I made the right decision because I fell in love with it right when I stepped on campus," Novi said.

She said she enjoyed the beautiful campus and the excellent Cox School of Business, which she plans to attend. The fact that SMU plays technical soccer was a plus, too, Novi said. She's played that style since she was 9 years old.

"It's more 'pretty soccer,' I like to call it," she said.

It's definitely the style of the Sockers, according to Novi's coach, Trey Bradberry. SMU was a good fit for Novi because it meshed with the way she grew up playing and her strengths, according to Bradberry. Novi's a talented attacking player, creative, a good passer, tricky, explosive and crafty, he said.

In the heart of the Sockers' season, Novi goes from school to 4 p.m. practice, which is an hour away, two or three times a week. Her mom drives her so Novi can change and do her homework in the car to "be efficient," Novi said.

"She has a really scrappy toughness to her that I think her teammates really respect," Bradberry said.

SMU went to the NCAA Tournament in 2016, finishing with a 13-7-2 record. Novi's looking forward to stepping onto SMU's Westcott Field for the first game.

"Wow, I made it," Novi said she imagines she'll think during the first game. "My dream's come true."

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