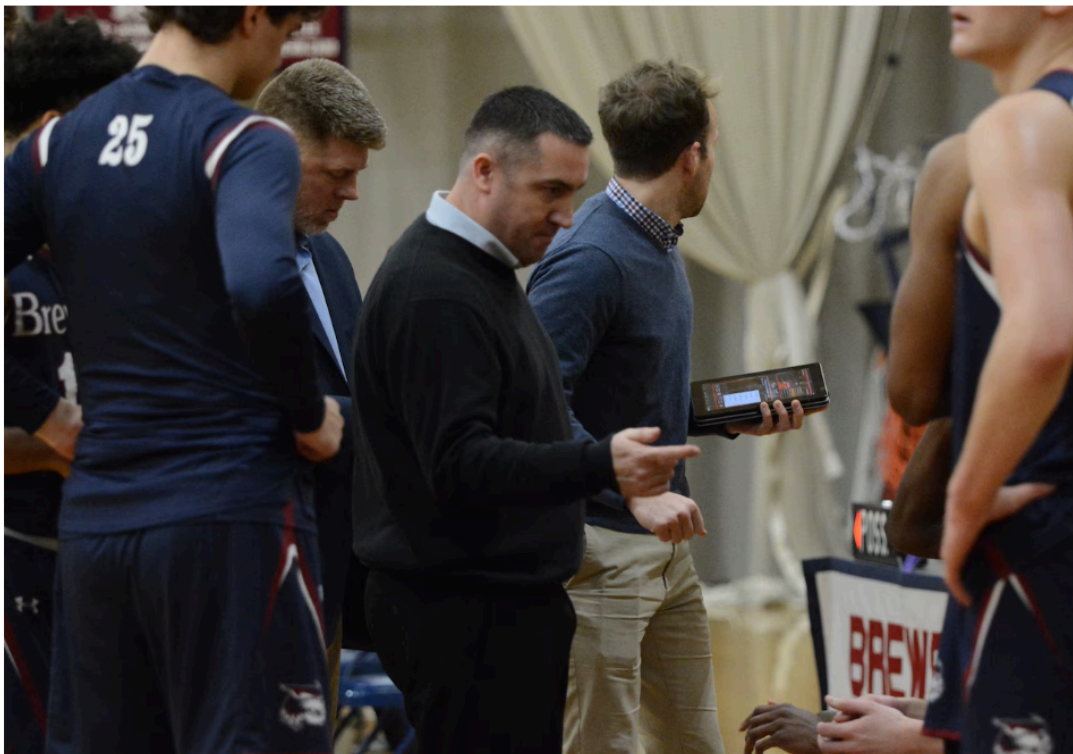




HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS

Building a basketball powerhouse: Jason Smith's ambitious journey to Masters Academy International

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Jason Smith, shown here coaching at Brewster Academy in 2019, was named the new boys basketball coach at Masters Academy International in Stow last week. JOSHUA SPAULDING/SALMON PRESS MEDIA JOSHUA SPAULDING/SALMON PRESS MEDIA

By [Jeff Lajoie | jlajoie@masslive.com](#)

The challenge of building a program from scratch was part of the reason Jason Smith signed on the dotted line to become the boys basketball coach at Masters Academy International.

The 52-year-old Smith was officially introduced as the program's first head coach last week.

Masters Academy International (MAI), a brand-new \$82-million elite athlete boarding school that opens its doors in Stow this fall, had [already hired former NMH basketball coach John Carroll as its Director of Basketball](#) last month.

Smith's hiring resonated throughout the high school basketball community at a national level. For 26 years, he served as head coach at Brewster Academy in Wolfeboro, N.H., racking up over 700 career wins and seven national prep championships.

During that time, Smith coached 25 NBA players, including Donovan Mitchell and Matas Buzelis, turning Brewster into a national powerhouse.

Smith said he's had to make sure his cell phone was charged more frequently than normal since taking the job, hearing from a wealth of former players and colleagues. But while leaving Brewster was not an easy decision, Smith said he has jumped into this new challenge with aplomb.

"A lot of the people that have reached out have almost had a sad tone, sad that I was leaving Brewster after so long," Smith explained on Monday. "I jokingly said, 'I'm not driving around town listening to Sarah McLachlan.' I'm excited, I'm ready to go, and I'm thrilled for the opportunity. I think it's going to be phenomenal."

The pairing of Smith with Carroll gives MAI instant credibility. The two former rivals, who coached against each other during some huge games between NMH and Brewster, are bringing this new model of "academy" basketball to the Northeast.

Student-athletes will spend half their day on academics, and half on their sport of choice. It will provide players with an extraordinary amount of coaching time, including year-round guidance.

The pair refer to MAI as the “IMG Academy” of the North, and plan to use the school’s resources to immediately turn the school into a basketball powerhouse.

“The model that Masters offers kids, there’s nothing like it in New England,” said Smith. “The amount of sheer time that you’re able to work with kids — four hours per day, combined with the four hours in person academically — it was a no-brainer.”

Carroll said last week that he expects MAI to be a top 10 basketball program nationally come next year.

Smith also has high expectations, but admitted there are still a lot of unknowns at this point. The campus in Stow is still under construction, and Smith said he keeps a hard hat and neon vest handy for site visits

The program is recruiting hard already, though, and staff has been pleased with the response.

MAI will field two teams — a Scholastic High School squad for undergrads and a Prep team for postgraduates. Those two rosters are expected to bring in 22-24 players combined, and as of Monday, two players had officially enrolled for the 2026-27 school year.

“We certainly have a lot of work to do,” Smith began. “We want to be competitive at a national level. We want to make sure all of our seniors and postgrads are placed in the top collegiate programs. And we want to continue to grow each year. But the goal out of the gate is to compete nationally.”

The new academy model that attracted both Smith and Carroll to eastern Massachusetts is quite the departure from where the sport was just 25 years ago.

Smith said that when he started coaching at Brewster in the fall of 2000, high-level basketball players either went to prep school in New England (at places like Brewster and NMH) or Virginia (at schools like Oak Hill Academy).

But over the past two decades, more schools and academies have opened throughout the country, adapting to the ever-changing model of high-level athletics.

Smith said that traditional New England boarding schools haven’t adjusted, and star players from the area have started to attend high school elsewhere.

Most recently, Brockton’s AJ Dybantsa started his high school career at Saint Sebastian’s School in Needham but ultimately left to attend Prolific Prep in California and then eventually Utah Prep Academy.

“I think what woke up people was when kids from this region started to leave and go outside the area for school,” Smith said.

That gap in the market helped give rise to the sprawling 3,000-plus-acre campus in Stow, which will soon be home to a basketball powerhouse.

“What we’re selling is a vision,” Smith explained. “An opportunity for what these families are looking for. I’ve only been on board for a week now, but we’ve had three families on campus and we’ve had phenomenal feedback. The resumes that John and I have, we’ve shown we can help kids develop and get to the next level. It’s just a matter of doing it here now.”