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HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS

# The Eye Test: Former NMH basketball coach John Carroll bets big on \$82M prep school in Stow



JOHN CARROLL joanna chattman

John Carroll hasn't taken a vacation in four years.

The former Northfield Mount Hermon boys basketball coach, who regularly had the Hoggers competing for prep national championships, is making waves with his newest gig.

Carroll was officially introduced last month as Director of Basketball for Masters Academy International (MAI), a brand-new \$82-million elite athlete boarding school that

For Carroll, who left NMH in 2022 after 21 seasons leading the boys basketball program, it's quite an opportunity and challenge.

It's also a chance to turn New England high school basketball on its head.

"The market is screaming for this," Carroll said earlier this week while attending the National Prep Championship in West Hartford, Conn.

MAI brings an elite sports boarding school to Massachusetts, the first of its kind in the Commonwealth. Think IMG Academy in Florida, where high school students enroll with eyes on becoming professionals in their sport of choice.

The school bills itself as a place to take talents to the next level. “MAI provides students with the tools and support to excel in the classroom, on the field, and in life,” according to a release.

As far as Carroll is concerned, this type of school has been a long time coming in the Northeast.

“We’re slow to evolve,” he explained of the region. “We’re way behind in terms of innovation and that’s a really dangerous place to be in terms of a business. I wouldn’t run any business that way.

“I’m very market-driven and the market has been asking for more athletics to align with higher-end academics. And it’s been asking that for a dozen years.”

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That's a big departure from his days coaching at NMH. Carroll left following the 2021-22 season after deciding athletic limitations from administration (some financial, some logistic) were going to prevent him from continuing to achieve at the level he wanted.

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"My ambition wasn't to run a program that wasn't going to be one of the best in the country," he said. "I thought what we were doing was pretty good and I wanted to keep innovating, but at the same time, there were limitations that were put on us, and were going to be put on us, and that's one of the reasons why I left. I didn't think that with the changes we were going to have to make, we would have a chance to be successful."

Limitations on athletics shouldn't be an issue at MAI. Carroll has spent the four years since his NMH departure running the basketball program at The Newman School in Boston, turning them into a powerhouse that won the NEPSAC Class AAA title last weekend.

Now he's moving to a place with even greater resources in Stow.

“I believed in the vision of the school and the person that was telling me the vision, then we had to build our relationship,” said Carroll of his conversations with MAI Co-Founder Peter Masters. “I’m not a guy who trusts easily, we had to earn each other’s trust. But they’ve overdelivered on every promise. It’s been extraordinary to see this thing take shape.”

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Carroll said the school will likely announce the head coaches for their boys and girls basketball programs next week. He said the girls coach is a Power 5 college assistant coach, and the boys coach is also currently working for a team playing in the postseason.

But while MAI is going to be resourced well, Carroll also expects them to win — and quickly.

In this modern age of prep school basketball, there’s no time to waste.

“I think we’re gonna have the best basketball coaching staff in the country. And I think we’ll be in the top 10 in the country Year 1,” he offered. “The combination of our staff is just going to attract really highly-ambitious and talented student-athletes.”

It'll be fascinating to see how quickly MAI becomes a powerhouse in not just New England, but across the country. When teams like IMG Academy come to Springfield to play in the Hoophall Classic, they turn heads with the number of top-100 recruits competing.

Carroll thinks his school is going to be at that level almost immediately.

"We had to slow down our recruitment because everyone was saying 'yes,'" he explained. "So we've been very intentional about who comes to campus and it's been a slow roll on purpose because the first four kids all said 'yes.'"

Regardless of future on-the-court performances, it's been quite a ride for Carroll over the past four years. From scouting for the WNBA's LA Sparks to broadcasting games on TV at UMass, he's been firmly entrenched in the basketball scene since departing NMH.

It's the only way he knows.

“When I left (NMH), I said that I was gonna say ‘yes’ to anything that was brought to the table,” he said. “And it’s brought a lot of cool stuff my way. When the decision was made to leave, it was all gas and all forward. I’ve never played the ‘what if I stayed,’ what it would look like game. I’ve just been having too much fun and I’m excited for what the future’s going to bring.”