Many people throughout the years have attempted to define what it takes to succeed. The great Vince Lombardi defines success as; “hard work, dedication to the job at hand, and the determination that whether we win or lose, we have applied the best of ourselves to the task at hand.” And when asked about the secret to success in an interview with Fortune Magazine, Dwayne ‘The Rock’ Johnson replied with, “There is no secret to success. Be humble. Be hungry. And always be the hardest worker in the room.” After looking through written articles, motivational videos, movie quotes and inspirational speakers there always seemed to be one reoccurring phrase when defining success; hard work.

When Jensen Caretti was about 5-years-old her mother said she would go outside to the driveway and place small piles of cat food around the basketball hoop to lure several of her families’ cats so she could practice dribbling around them. When her adoptive parents, Sharon and Daniel, bought her an Xbox she would mimic the moves the players did in the game out in the driveway. “That’s just how I learned to play the game,” Caretti said. Thirteen years later, Jensen, now a senior at River High School in Clarington, Ohio, stands at 6-foot-2, with a 76-inch wingspan and with a vertical leap of almost 30-inches, is considered one of best high school basketball players in the country.

The Caretti family resides in Clarington, Ohio. The 1.2 square mile town, nestled up next to the Ohio River, is home to less than 400 people. There is a gas station, a post office but no stoplights and every Sunday the Caretti’s drive an hour away just to attend church. “The back roads actually lead to more back roads,” Jensen said, “it’s crazy to know that people actually live this far away from everything.” Because of how secluded the Caretti’s live, there was never a real chance for Jensen to demonstrate her ability to “big time” schools. In fact, the only offers she had were to Kent State University, Niagara, Youngstown State and Xavier.

In June, Caretti and her local AAU basketball team were playing for fifth place in the Linsly Shootout basketball tournament in Wheeling, West Virginia. On the court adjacent to them was renowned AAU coach Kirk Perry and his team who were playing in the championship game. Perry has coached AAU basketball for over 20 years and currently runs the Cleveland-based Next Level AAU program. The Next Level program has produced some of the best players in the state including Duke University commit Shay Selby, Illinois commit Karisma Penn and UCLA commit Nirra Fields. While in overtime of his championship game, Perry turned around and that’s when he noticedJensen. “She really caught my eye immediately because she was the tallest girl on the court and as I kept watching she made like seven 3-pointers in a row,” coach Perry said in an interview with ESPNW, “I knew I had a game to coach but I also needed to know who this girl was.” According to the article, when Jensen had finished her game, it was then that Perry told his assistant coach to take over as he left to introduce himself to her and her family and said he wanted her to play on his team. “I didn’t know who he was,” Jensen said, “he talked to me for 10 minutes and asked if I could come play for his team the next weekend at a tournament in Cincinnati and I said sure.” What Jensen and her family didn’t know was how drastically their lives were going to change seven days later.

Jensen talked with her parents about what coach Perry had said to them. “I knew it was a good opportunity for Jensen but she would have had to go by herself because of other family engagements,” Jenson’s mother Sharon said. Days later, on that Friday, Jensen left for Cincinnati to play in a 3-day long tournament with a team she had never met and for a coach she had spoken to for only 10 minutes. “When I got to the gym I was nervous because I completely forgot what (Perry) looked like,” Caretti said, “thankfully after a few minutes of just standing there I finally saw him as he was yelling my name.” The tournament consisted of three games, one game per day, and throughout the game college coaches from around the country would watch and recruit players for their respective teams. According to Caretti only a few coaches showed up to watch the Next Level program compete in their first game. But by game three, nearly 60 coaches were sitting in the stands with their eyes glued to Caretti. When the tournament ended Caretti left to make the 4-hour long drive back home to Clarington unaware of what was to come.

“Starting at around 10:00 in the morning the day she got home and ending at 9:30 or 10:00 in the evening, the home telephone, my cell phone and Jensen’s cell phone rang non stop,” exclaimed Sharon, “I would be getting calls from coaches while I was still on the phone talking to other coaches! It was crazy!” Overnight Jensen became one of the most sought after players in the country. She went from having mid-major scholarship offers from Kent State and Buffalo in May to having full-ride scholarships offers in June to programs such as Ohio State, South Carolina, Rutgers, University of Louisville, Tennessee and Michigan -- justto name a few. According to the University of Pittsburgh head women’s basketball coach and former WNBA player Suzie McConnell-Serio, “Good Division I programs begin scouting and recruiting players with the same talent as Jensen when they first enter high school.” McConnell-Serio also mentioned that, “When I first heard of Jensen I couldn’t believe that someone with that much talent went unnoticed from us especially with how close lives to our campus.” Not only did coaches reach out to her by phone but also through her mail. According to Jenson’s mother Sharon, universities were sending her so many letters that it began to not fit in the mailbox. “It got to the point where I told our mailman to just put them all by the front door so I didn’t have to walk down to the mailbox every morning,” Sharon said. Over the course of the first few weeks, Jensen’s mother was on the phone for up to 10 hours a day talking to recruiters while Jensen would be taking notes on who called and what they would offer. And as of now, 42 Division I schools have contacted Caretti and a 15 inch tall stack of envelopes that she hasn’t even had the chance to open yet sit on the kitchen table. “It has been an overwhelming few months but a great experience like no other,” Caretti said.

On September 26 and 27, Jensen will play in The Ohio Girls Basketball Report Top 64 Showcase, which features the top 100 seniors in the state, at Reynoldsburg High School in Reynoldsburg, Ohio. According to ESPN, Caretti is the number one prospect in the state and ranked #31 in the nation as a player and the #6 best shooting guard in the country. She is currently undecided but should have her decision by the end of October. When asked how she defines success, Jensen said, “It’s hard work, dedication and by keeping God first success will follow.”