

EAST OREGONIAN SPORTS

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B1

Making it work

Health issues don't hold back Hermiston's McDonald

By ANNIE FOWLER
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — A bottle of teriyaki sauce has turned Ryker McDonald's world upside down. As a Type 1 diabetic and a person with severe gluten allergies, the gluten-free sauce was an explosion of taste the Hermiston senior had never experienced.

"Since I found that, my life has changed," McDonald said. "It's everything I need in my life. I put it on chicken, potatoes, veggies. It's pretty constant with every meal I have."

McDonald has lived with both health issues since he was a baby, but that hasn't held him back from participating in sports or student council, where he is associated student body president.

"It's just exciting," McDonald said. "Life is fun. I'm not going to let any disease get in the way of me experiencing life. Ten years ago, no one knew what gluten was. My mom was calling manufacturers to make sure food wasn't going to kill me off. I don't know any different. There's not too much I'm missing out on."

Participating in sports might not be the correct way to describe McDonald's athletic endeavors. He played on the defensive line in football and is one of the top sprinters Hermiston has ever turned out. He also throws the shot put and is one of the strongest youths in the weight room.

"I played soccer until middle school, then I played football," McDonald said. "My mom's whole side of the family has been in track. My mom (Sara) did college track at Central Washington and my dad (Ethan) played football at Central Washington."

In the weight room, McDonald squats more than 500 pounds, his bench is not far off 300 pounds and he cleans 250 pounds.

From the weight room to the football field to the track, Hermiston football coach Davis Faeteete said he is impressed with the way McDonald makes it all happen.

"It has been fun to watch him grow and evolve, and go through all these medical issues," he said. "That he is able to come out on top is a reflection of who he is and how great he was parented by his parents. He embodies that Hermiston grit."

The 6-foot, 205-pound McDonald goes into the Mid-Columbia Conference 3A track and field championships Friday, May 13, as the No. 2 man in the 100 meters, and the No. 2 shot put thrower behind teammate Caden Hottman. He also runs on the 4x100 relay team.

"I look more like a shot put thrower than a sprinter," McDonald said. "Caden is a great motivator over there. Him helping me out is probably why I look like I belong over there. I'm usually coming up to the sprints with chalk on my neck and hands and tape on my wrists. I get a few looks."

McDonald's top time of 11.19 seconds in the 100 meters ranks third all-time at Hermiston, while his throw of 48-3 1/2 ranks 15th on the shot put leaderboard.

"If I can prep it right and get my blocks down, I might get sub 11," he said of the 100. "Especially running against fast dudes at regionals and state. You run against fast guys and that speeds up your time. I have a good chance to break that school record (Luis Ortiz, 11.04)."

Hermiston sprints coach Mike Mosher said despite his large frame, he thought McDonald could be a heck of a sprinter.

"Watching him in football throughout his years, watching him play soccer and getting him in summer workouts, I could see that he had not only football speed but track speed."

McDonald will be pushed at district by Southridge's Lucien Cone and Walla Walla's Jakob Humphrey. The top three advance to regionals next week, and from there the top two go to state.



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian, File

Ryker McDonald of Hermiston races the 100-meter dash in a Mid-Columbia Conference track-and-field meet April 20, 2022, in Hermiston.

"BEING DIABETIC IS A STRUGGLE, BUT IT HAS GIVEN ME EXPERIENCE AND IT TEACHES YOU EMPATHY."

— Ryker McDonald, Hermiston High School senior

"We are right at the top," Mosher said. "There is a guy from Mead (Keenan Kuntz) who is pretty good. Ryker is right in the mix at 2-3. He has parts of his race he needs to clean up."

It's not easy

What fans see on the field and on the track takes a tremendous amount of work and dedication, but it also takes a lot of self-awareness by McDonald.

He has a diabetic sensor on the back of his arm that gives him a reading on his phone and his parents' phones. It also sends signals to his insulin pump on his stomach, which will release doses of insulin when needed.

It saves him from having to prick his finger and use a glucose monitor during games or track meets. The reading on his phone takes a couple of seconds.

The monitor helps in one respect, but there are other issues associated with diabetes.

"Growing up with diabetes instills discipline through the roof," McDonald said. "The problems I went through during football, I had to be on top of it every day. The way I go about and the way I train. If something happens, the coaches know what I need to do. For my diet, I'm low on carbs, I try to keep my blood sugars where they are balanced. If they are too low, I get a little disoriented, like I'm on drugs. I have special glucose tablets, and Capri Suns have been a big part of my life. They have been my best friends for a long time."

But that's not all.

"We try to manage my diabetes, but I am getting bigger and my body is still changing," McDonald said. "I wasn't going to let it get in the way of my team. I started getting some nerve issues in my feet between my junior and senior year, and I wasn't able to handle things. Coach (Eddie) Lopez helped me so much. Before (football) games, I would put ointment on my feet that his mom made to help calm them down. That helped with the diabetic neuropathy. It helped me be able to play."

Faeteete said he is impressed with how McDonald handles everything.

"He's a good kid, and he works so hard," Faeteete said. "You can only ask so much from a kid who has to deal with that every day. He loves his teammates and he feels like he is letting them down if he can't play."

Living with diabetes is one thing, but his gluten allergy is extreme.

His food cannot be made on the same kitchen counter with food with gluten. It must be thoroughly cleaned. Even a few crumbs can give him digestive issues for hours.

"Anything that has any gluten

cannot touch my food," McDonald said. "It's bad. Being in sports and having celiac disease you feel fatigued if you get any gluten. You aren't back to 100% for days. My dad has celiac disease too. My mom is gluten free now too, by choice."

When he was diagnosed with celiac disease as a child, his mom spent hours a day making sure his food was safe.

"They have sacrificed so much to keep me healthy to play sports," McDonald said. "My mom has turned into a health nut. She is on top of everything. With celiac disease and diabetes you find yourself deficient in some vitamins."

McDonald said it was harder when he was younger. He felt he was being left out.

"There were a lot of elementary birthday parties where I didn't get the cupcake," he said. "I would be so mad."

Now, when the football or track team goes on the road, he will pack his own meals, or the team will stop at a store where he can get safe items to eat.

"My coaches go out of their way to make sure I eat right," McDonald said. "We have such a great coaching staff at Hermiston. No one should take them for granted."

A bright future

McDonald volunteers at a camp for diabetic kids in Kennewick through Trios Health Southridge Hospital. He went to the same camp when he was younger.

"Being diabetic is a struggle, but it has given me experience and it teaches you empathy," McDonald said. "I don't think I would be as good of a human being. When you are young, you don't understand. You have to go through so many procedures to keep yourself safe. To be able to help them manage it so it's not in the forefront of their minds is fulfilling. Paying it forward is fulfilling. That is something I don't take for granted."

College sports are not on the horizon for McDonald, but he will be attending Oregon State University and majoring in mechanical engineering. He would like to be an aerospace engineer.

"I had a few colleges reach out, but I wasn't interested," McDonald said. "I wasn't wondering what will be harder, trying to manage sports or trying to live without sports. I'm going to try the student life. It might take a few months. I gotta see what life is like past high school. I will be actively working out. They have really good teams at Oregon State. There will always be something to watch, but I'm afraid I will want to play again."

GOLF

Teeing up for state

Pendleton's McLeod qualifies for 5A tournament

By ANNIE FOWLER
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Pendleton's Zach McLeod shot two of his best rounds of golf on Monday and Tuesday, May 9-10, to punch his ticket to the 5A state tournament.

Those scores — an 81 and an 87 — came at the right time at the 5A District 1 regional tournament at Heron Lakes Golf Club in Portland, where he finished tied for eighth.

"They were two of the best rounds I have played this year, and I was happy to take them there," McLeod said. "At the moment, I wasn't happy with an 87. I thought I would have to do better than that to go to state. I had a better of a lead than I thought. It's good to shoot better than you need to."

Pendleton coach Marc Sokoloski, who took over the boys program at the start of the 2020 season, said McLeod's game had improved the past few weeks heading into district.

"Zach has the potential to do well," Sokoloski said. "Three weeks ago, he was shooting 95 and 96. I'm excited for him. I knew it would come, just not in a big jump like this. After a few tournaments, he got a grasp on what he needed to do to manage the course. The fact he got in the top 10, I was thrilled to say the least. This will be a good experience for him."

The 5A state tournament is May 16-17 at Trysting Tree Golf Club in Corvallis. The beautiful Par 71 course is 6,537 yards and winds along the Willamette River floodplain.

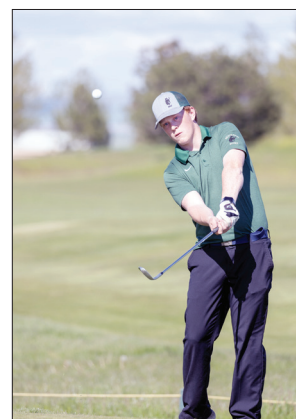
"I'm excited," McLeod said. "I haven't played there, but my sister Mackenzie has. She played on the girls teams that won the state title a couple years ago (2019)."

Sokoloski said the Trysting Tree course is suited to McLeod's game.

"It's more long and not precise," he said. "The two courses they played (in Portland) were completely different. They had a lot of trees. You just don't want to play yourself out of contention the first day."

The Pendleton coach also said he believes McLeod has the ability to place well at state.

"When he started playing to win and not just to have fun, his game improved," Sokoloski said. "It wouldn't surprise me if



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian

Pendleton High School golfer Zach McLeod chips onto the Wildhorse Golf Course practice green on Wednesday, May 11, 2022. McLeod will compete at the School Activities Association 5A state tournament May 16-17 at Trysting Tree Golf Club in Corvallis.

he came out and shot a 78 or 79. I think he can be in the top 20. It will be a grind. The learning curve he is at now, when things are going good, that is great. When it's not, he needs to learn to make those adjustments on the fly. It's the mental side that I think is starting to elevate his game."

McLeod is the first Pendleton player to advance to state since 2019 when Matt Robertson (197) and Zech Cyr (181) qualified.

"It's nice to go," McLeod said. "Going by myself is kind of disappointing. I will try to do some damage and have fun while I'm there. Next year, our goal is to have a team there."

A junior, McLeod has been playing golf since middle school. His family has a membership at Golf Course at Birch Creek in Pendleton, but he also enjoys playing at Wildhorse Golf Course.

"I like Birch Creek a lot better," he said. "That's the course I grew up playing. It's more of a sentimental thing, I think."

While he can occasionally get his parents Travis and Heather out on the course, McLeod typically golfs with his teammates or friends from work at Gordon's Electric.

"Recently, me and Mason Morioka have been going every day," McLeod said. "We both wanted to go to state. My parents play some, but I wouldn't say they are avid golfers."

Playing in the Intermountain Conference, McLeod has had the opportunity to play some of the best courses in Oregon, but he has a favorite.

"We've played a lot of the Bend courses this year, but Indian Creek in Hood River is one of the most beautiful courses I have played on," he said. "I got to do that twice. I really like that one."

ON THE SLATE

Schedule subject to change

SATURDAY, MAY 14

Prep baseball
Stanfield/Echo at Pilot Rock (2), 11 a.m.
Dufur at Weston-McEwen (2), 11 a.m.
Pendleton at Crook County (2), noon

Prep softball
Crook County at Pendleton (2), noon
3A District 8: Mead at Hermiston, 1 p.m.

Prep lacrosse
3A state playoffs: Hermiston at Peninsula, TBD

Track and field
MCC Championships at Hermiston, 10:45 a.m.
Pendleton at IMC Championships, Prinsville, noon
Griseville, lone at 1A-SD3 Championships, Wasco County, noon
Irrigon, Riverside, Umatilla at 3A-SD3 Championships, La Pine, TBD

McLoughlin at GOL District Championships, 10 a.m.

College baseball
Blue Mountain at Spokane (2), 1 p.m.

College softball
Blue Mountain at Walla Walla (2), noon

MONDAY, MAY 16

Prep golf
5A boys state tournament, Trysting Tree Golf Club, Corvallis, TBD

TUESDAY, MAY 17

Prep baseball
Crook County at Pendleton, 4:30 p.m.
Touchet at McLoughlin, 4 p.m.

Prep softball
Pendleton at Crook County, 4:30 p.m.

Prep golf
5A boys state tournament, Trysting Tree Golf Club, Corvallis, TBD