

Local Athletes Get Top Grades in the Classroom

■ Willamina students are changing area perceptions about their school.

By Chris Mercier

If Willamina High School's own student athletes have made a concerted effort to dispel the myth of dumb jock stereotypes, they're not letting on. But then again, maybe just maybe they enjoy the satisfaction of a well-deserved report card just as much as a hard-earned victory in their respective sports.

Whatever the reason, 2001 was a remarkable year for athletes at Willamina High School (WHS), not because they've kicked butt on the courts and fields. No, they've been kicking some serious tail in the classroom as well.

The average Grade Point Average of a Willamina athlete participating in fall sports this year — football, cross-country, volleyball — was anywhere from 3.29 to 3.70, good for fourth among 2A schools in the state of Oregon. Twelve student athletes had 4.0 GPA's.

"It's pretty amazing the grades they have considering all they do," said WHS Athletic Director Jerry Buczynski. "We should be amazed at what they accomplish at their age, especially with their workload."

Buczynski has worked at WHS in a variety of capacities over the last 19 years, many of them coaching positions. Few people know better than him just how demanding the act of balancing athletics and academics can be.

"Between practice every other day, games, and homework, these kids don't have a whole lot of time," he said.

Which makes WHS accomplishment all the more impressive. The Oregon State Athletic Association began its academic watch four



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years ago under the sponsorship of the Oregon Dairy Farmers, the idea being to make sure that kids' grades don't slip while engaging in sports, thus keeping goals of college entirely realistic.

"Some kids don't understand the importance of GPA until it's too late," Buczynski said. "They start looking at college their senior years. What's it take to get into U of O (University of Oregon), a 3.25 GPA? They look at that and say 'Uh-oh.'"

Fortunately, that particular scenario hasn't been commonplace, though it happens enough to warn others. But with coaches and peers constantly emphasizing academics, and with a single "F" grade making a student ineligible for sports, athletes have more motivation. In fact, Buczynski has noticed that on average, athletes tend to have higher GPA's than normal students, and almost specifically for those reasons, among others.

Other reasons may include the system of progress reports set up by OSAA. Every three weeks teachers submit athletes' grades to coaches and staff. An "F" gets a student athlete suspended from their respected sport for one week. If after six weeks the "F" still lingers, a

two-week suspension follows. At nine weeks, a three-week suspension ensues. Should a student athlete receive an "F" for an entire term, then the following term they may not participate in sports whatsoever.

"The eligibility standards are always in place," said Buczynski.

Moreover, he said, it is not unusual for coaches; ever the disciplinarians to even demand athletes skip practices to catch up on homework. Buczynski can remember watching one coach forcing a player to spend an entire practice studying and doing homework, while teammates scrimmaged. Such measures evidently work.

Patrick Willis, a senior, has managed to maintain a 4.00 GPA, a testament to discipline that he called "tough."

"This really keeps your schedule full," he said. "My days are just packed."

Like many of his peers, Willis engages in sports year-round, spending his autumns on the cross-country team, winters with wrestling, and each spring on the track squad. Tack on to that a senior project, and it's no wonder Willis calls Sunday "the only free day I have."



Smart Player — Tribal member Caitlin Zimbrick scored a 4.0 GPA this year while playing on the Willamina High School varsity volleyball team this last fall.

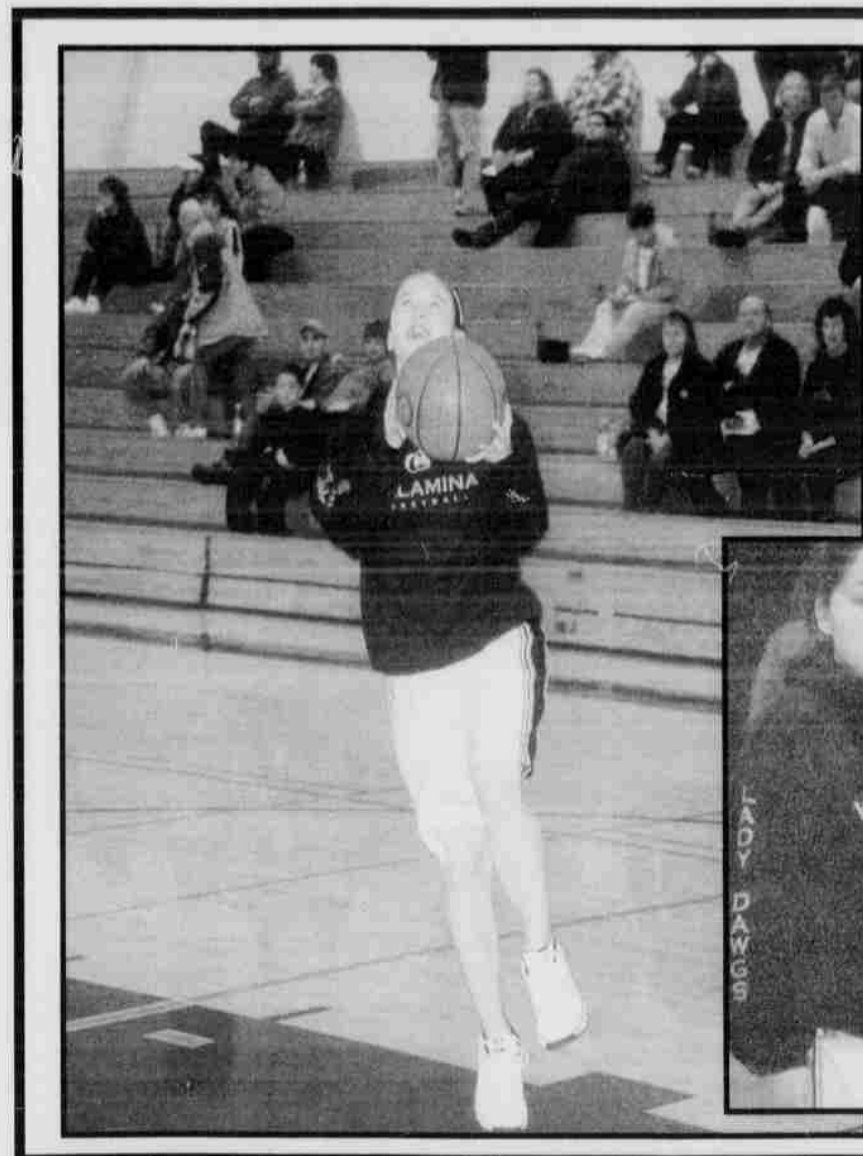
Photos by Peta Tinda

Junior Matt Zimbrick, a Grand Ronde Tribal member, also lives as a three-sport guy, playing football as a wide receiver and free safety, playing out winters on the basketball squad and each spring doing track. All that with a 3.80 GPA.

"Yeah, I don't have a whole lot of free time either," he said, noting that basketball is the toughest since they must practice nearly every day and have two or three games a week.

Tribal member Caitlin Zimbrick, a sophomore, agreed that basketball is the toughest on her schedule as well. Volleyball, in fact, she said is pretty easy on one's schedule. She also does track, making her a three-sport student athlete with a GPA of 4.00.

Does the discipline of sports carry over into academics? Apparently, since all three students plan on going to college, which with their GPA's shouldn't be any problem. ■



Photos by Brent Merrill



Bulldog Hoops — Basketball season in the West Valley is in full swing at Willamina High School. A recent date with the junior varsity teams from Amity gave Tribal members HighPine Eastman (top, #22), Andrea Childers (far left) and Janell Lara the opportunity to get out on the court and show their skills in front of the home crowd on Saturday, January 5 in Willamina.