

Kaelynn maintains a 3.75 GPA at school

**SOFTBALL continued
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drives me on those days when I don't want to practice ... that college dream."

In addition to a full schedule as an athlete, Kaelynn, 17, maintains a 3.75 GPA at Dallas High School.

"I do that by prioritizing important stuff," she says. "The student comes before the athlete. I always do my school projects first because that is what will eventually get me to what I want in life."

Kaelynn is the daughter of Kevin Simmons, who works in the Tribe's Education Department, and Robin Simmons. She has been playing softball since the age of 7 and gravitated toward pitching almost immediately.

"It just felt fun for me," Kaelynn says. "I like the ability to have something to do that is an outlet for stress relief. For me, it also helps that I am pretty good at it. I like striking people out and being able to pitch for long games."

Beyond practice and games, her training involves athletic conditioning, working on improving speed and pitching lessons.

Beyond being offered scholarships from three universities and being heavily recruited by another, the proof of all this hard work lies in the various accolades she has received during her high school



Contributed photo

Tribal member Kaelynn Simmons has played softball for Dallas High School for the last three years and will continue her athletic career playing for the Western Washington University Vikings.

softball career.

As a freshman, she was named a First Team Mid-Willamette Valley Conference Infielder and also selected for the *Polk County Itemizer-Observer* All Polk County Team. During her sophomore year, she earned the prestigious 5A State Pitcher of the Year award and as a junior Kaelynn was named First-Team All-State Pitcher.

In August 2016, Kaelynn attended a softball clinic held in Grand Ronde that featured Oregon State

University assistant coach Emily Friedman and player Lovie Lopez. She was quickly identified for her pitching and hitting skills, and invited to attend a softball camp with top youth athletes from all over the country.

"That kicked off a whole bunch of things and schools really started looking at her," Kevin recalls. "Now she trains with the best in the country. ... It really was a community effort at the Tribe and she has a lot of support here."

Tribal Social Services Director Dana Ainam has known Kaelynn for several years since her daughter also plays softball and both girls attended several of the same Youth Prevention camps and clinics.

"I went to Kaelynn's first game when she was 13 and have been following her softball success since then," Ainam says. "I'm really excited for her. It takes a huge commitment to be able to play for a four-year university under a full-ride scholarship, and a huge family commitment to the goal as well."

Playing and practicing with the best in her sport is something that motivates Kaelynn to work even harder to achieve goals.

"It really helps me up my game because it gives me confidence," she

says. "I know I can compete with them and it's nice to be able to do that. ... I thrive on competition."

Kaelynn received scholarship offers from Southern Oregon University in Ashland, Western Washington University and Corban University in Salem, and was heavily recruited by Linfield College in McMinnville.

After touring campuses and talking to coaches, she went to Western Washington to visit before making a final decision.

"As soon as I saw the campus, talked to players and looked at the fields, I knew right away it was the place for me," Kaelynn says. "It just felt so right."

Off the softball field, she said she plans to major in psychology and earn a master's degree in psychiatric nursing.

Kaelynn encourages fellow Tribal youth to "never give up" on their dreams and keep at it, even when it seems progress is slow.

"Keep working," she says. "If you know what your dream is, you have to work for it. Do more work than what is average if you want to achieve success."

Most student athletes have had mentors along the way and Kaelynn is no exception.

"I am grateful to my parents and my ancestors for paving the way for me," she says. "Teresa Wilson, one of my coaches for my travel team, is a big inspiration, too. She helped me want to play at the college level and see it was possible."

Wilson coached the University of Washington Huskies softball team for 11 years and they reached the NCAA Women's College World Series six times.

"She has really helped me to get to where I am today," Kaelynn says.

Kaelynn will be signing her commitment letter to Western Washington University at 5:30 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 23, at the Tribal Community Center. The public is invited to attend.

"This is also an achievement for the Grand Ronde community," Ainam says. "It's important to celebrate moments like this. It gives back to all of us." ■

Makai Simmons named to Team USA football



Photo courtesy of Kevin Simmons

Makai Simmons, 15, is a sophomore at Dallas High School and has been playing football for three years. This past summer he attended a USA Football Seattle regional tryout and was then selected to attend U.S. National Team Training Camp in Ohio in July, where he earned an opportunity to play for the U.S. National Team. He also attended camp at IMG Academy and was invited to play for IMG Academy. In addition to IMG Academy, he attended Stanford University Elite Defensive Back Camp and also Brigham Young University Camp where he was selected as Defensive MVP.

By Danielle Frost
Smoke Signals staff writer

Kaylene Simmons isn't the only child in the Simmons family to achieve high athletic goals.

Younger brother Makai, 15, has been invited to play as defensive back on the U.S. Under-17 National Team at International Bowl X in Dallas, Texas.

The U.S. Under-17 National Team will face Team Japan on Friday, Jan. 18, at 1 p.m. Central.

Simmons, a sophomore at Dallas High School, has been playing football for three years. This

past summer, he attended USA Football Seattle regional tryouts and was selected to attend the national training camp in Ohio in July, where he earned his opportunity to play for the national team.

Additionally, Simmons also attended IMG Academy Football Academy camp and was invited to play for that team. He also went to Stanford University's Elite Defensive Back Camp and Brigham Young University Camp where he was selected as Defensive MVP. ■

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