

Cheer from 1B

“We had a couple of injuries from stunting, so I reached out to Adria [Sandusky] one night and asked her, with it being her senior year, if it would be okay if we switched to non-building, meaning we just wouldn't stunt in our routine — no lifts, throws or tosses, just jumps, tumbling and dance.”

It was a difficult decision to make, especially with

Sandusky being the captain of the squad, but the two were on the same page the whole way through.

“She immediately got back to me saying that she was thinking the same thing,” said Straley. “She'd rather be safe than sorry and have her team injured. So, we changed that, adapted, added new things, and it worked out really well.”

Without that part of scoring in competition, Straley saw a big difference in the teams tumbling and our

non-building skills at competitions.

“Our scores were higher than they were last year and, knowing that with the time we spent really cleaning it [up] — even next year with new members — that portion will still be strong enough that we can score even higher and hopefully compete against some of the schools that are way bigger than we are.”

Making the move to compete as a non-building team this year also allowed the

squad to compete on more even ground.

“For this competition that we just recorded, which is the OCCA (Oregon Cheerleading Coaches Association) Championships Traditional Routine, we're competing against Henley, Cottage Grove and Ontario, and they're all 'non-building,’” said Straley. “So, this year was kind of splitting it up with your 4A building teams and your 4A non-building teams.”

Having Sandusky — who is a fourth-year cheerleader and second year captain — as a sounding board has also been a tremendous asset to Straley. Aside from the fact that Sandusky has been with the team for all of her high school career, she has cheering in her blood; her mother was a major motivation for her continuing her career as a cheerleader throughout her tenure at Siuslaw.

“My mom did cheer at Marshfield,” explained Sandusky, “so she was always saying, ‘When I have a little girl, she's going to do cheer!’” So, I did, and I really fell in love with it.”

In addition to her improvement as a result of hard work put in, Sandusky cites her friendships with her teammates as another reason for committing to the squad over the years.

“All the girls that I've met have really been my best friends,” she said, noting that she didn't have a lot of friends in high school. “I

just really focused on homework and that was it. But once I got to cheer, it didn't even feel like practice. It just kind of felt like I got to hang out with my friends and have a good time creating bonds with everybody. That's what kept me going; I had really great people at practice and they just made it so fun.”

According to Sandusky, the most challenging aspect of this year as a captain — and also as an athlete in track and field — was the late start of the season.

“They weren't accepting indoor sports for a long time,” said Sandusky, “and even though cheer could really be indoor or outdoor, they just weren't accepting it for a long time, so it was kind of hard to find that time to practice.”

In addition, it was virtual for quite a while, which made it difficult to learn the routines as quickly as normal. Plus, the senior was also working five days a week.

“So, trying to find those days that I could come in [was a challenge]. I came in after a seven-hour shift today, and I was like, ‘Okay, cheer!’”

Sandusky definitely has a glass-half-full mentality, and an incredible work ethic for such a young person.

“It's kind of a blessing and a curse with COVID,” she said, “because with the virtual [experience], it gave me time at home to do it, but I was also able to work

full time — so I've been able to afford really great things and still do cheer while doing school online.”

As a captain, Sandusky feels a strong responsibility to her team as a leader. She notes, “Of course coach keeps them in check, but [so do I], because I'm actually out on the floor with them correcting them. [Sometime at practice], I would be with the girls, telling them have confidence, raise your voice, sharpen your motions, this is what it needs to look like!”

“I feel like that was probably one of my biggest responsibilities: keeping them encouraged, making sure they had confidence and that they were hitting everything that they needed to hit.”

Sandusky was a great source of motivation for her team throughout and described how last year's state competition was her best memory of her cheerleading career at Siuslaw.

“It was the only year that I've been able to go to state,” she explained. “It was kind of messy, there was some drama, but we pushed through and pulled together as a team. But just having the experience of going to state and getting ready and feeling the adrenaline was probably my favorite memory altogether.”

As far as this year, Sandusky has been very proud of her team for the speed with which they were able to learn their routines after having their season cut short. And she has cherished the bond they developed this year as a result.

“Past years before competitions,” she said, “we'd have months and months before to practice, but this year, we had maybe a month before our first competition, and we didn't know anything. But all the girls really tried their hardest to learn as quickly as they could, which is what I'm really proud of them for. Everybody could really put in their best effort, and it turned out good.”

After this school year ends, Sandusky plans to attend Oregon State University (OSU) for e-campus studies, and she will also assistant coach cheer with Straley. Sandusky has a big interest in bees, so she will attend some classes in person for OSU's beekeeping program with the intention of one day starting her own business.

“Adria has been a tremendously good captain,” noted Straley. “She tried out last year as a junior for captaincy and has done great. We've just had this bond where, if she's frustrated with something in practice, she can come to me about it — and if I'm frustrated with something, we kind of just have each other's back. So, with her assistant coaching next year and being an extra set of eyes, it will be great. I look forward to having her with us.”

Both Straley and Sandusky hopes that the future brings more trophies to the squad, as well as more recognition for the school as a competition team.

“That's something that a lot of people don't know,” said Straley. “Yesterday, we did a performance for some of the staff at the high school, because some of them don't know that we do competition outside of cheering at football games or basketball games. We're like, ‘Actually, we have a whole secret thing we do behind your backs!’”

Hopefully, next year will bring even more success to the voice of the Vikings.

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The mission of NAMI Lane County is to improve the quality of life for individuals living with mental health conditions and their friends, families, loved ones, and caregivers through support, education, and advocacy.

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