

Continued from B1

because of her skill; a girl who has had dreams of playing football since she was little.

"It really started when I was in second grade," said Tayla who during a non-contact practice before a recent game is the only one wearing running shorts and a ponytail. "I've wanted to play ever since then just because my poppa and my dad and my uncles kept telling me stories and stories of how awesome it was."

And so it was decided. Tayla was going to play football amongst the boys and that was that.

"She really has that self-driven attitude. She always has, she always has. I mean, I've told her, you were born stubborn and you have not changed," said Tayla's mother Rebecca Swearingin.

It was in this grit, this determination, this resolve, this stubbornness that led Tayla to start playing. From a young age she was insistent that she was going to play despite her parents' attempt to steer her away from a game of tackling and collisions ("It took me awhile to talk my mom into it," recalled Tayla). They warned her the boys might be mean and that it might not be fun but nothing would sway her resolve. So in fifth grade, when football is first offered in Elkton, she was ready to go.

"It was the first practice she walked on the field and there was one boy that said one rude thing to her and when practice was over he apologized to her and she has not had a single problem since. Not one. It's just been Tayla is part of the team," said Rebecca.

Now as a part of the team, the game that she had been warned against, she has fallen for.

"My very first game that I played, I just loved it so much," said Tayla. "But I was exhausted. I was dead. Like I just went home and laid on the floor. I knew that if I didn't want to be like that I had to put in a lot of work."

And so Tayla did just that. In sixth grade she became a starter and soon after, started weights with Mike Hughes – her sixth grade and current coach at Elkton High School.

"She has no fear. I mean, she doesn't. She is extremely committed to what she does. She has natural strength," said Hughes. "For example she started lifting with me when she was in the seventh grade because I lift with the kids in the weight room. And now, on the leg press machine, there isn't a boy on this team that can out press her. She's pretty close to 600 pounds and she does it easy."

This constant work into making herself better has brought her to this: her freshman year at Elkton High School. No longer competing with the middle school boys, Tayla has now entered into the world of 1A football. Because of the school size in 1A, there is no freshman or JV team but just the varsity team. This means that 14-year-old Tayla can conceivably, and consistently, be facing off against 18-year-old boys on the line of scrimmage.

"I didn't worry all these other years because, like I said, she's always taller and bigger than most of the boys," said Rebecca. "Whereas this year, she is not. Most of the boys are bigger than her."

This is the first year I've worried about it. But with her, it's not going to do anything to worry. She's going to do it anyways so I guess I'll just, if something happens, we'll deal with it."

One adjustment that Tayla did not have to make was fitting in with her new team. While there were some players that she had not played with, since Elkton is a town of 200 and two of her teammates are her cousins, everyone knew who she was and they were ready to embrace their new teammate.

"She just fits in perfectly with everybody. Same sense of humor, yeah just fits in," said Jayden Woody who is a captain on the team and one of Tayla's cousins. "It's pretty awesome. It's pretty cool knowing that my cousin is a badass. She's the only girl on a football team and that's pretty cool."

Aside from having to change in a different spot before practices and games, she is just one of the boys on the team.

"It's unique, it's different but it hasn't been uncomfortable or weird at all," said head coach Bill Shaw. "She fits in perfectly and... she's just part of the group. No worse, no better. Just normal football stuff. There's never any, 'Hey, go easy on her.' There are other kids that I'm more worried about people going easy on than her."

While the team fully accepts her and understand what she is capable of, she can still come as a surprise to her opponents.

"They'll always whisper something to their buddies," said Tayla. "Or they'll just stare me down, and then I obviously stare right back at them and we'll have an intense competition there. And then they go easy on me because they think, 'Oh, she's a girl. We can take this play off.' But then I hit them and they keep coming back harder and harder as I keep going harder and harder."

This was the case earlier this season when the Elks took on Camas Valley on the road. Camas Valley, currently ranked 5th in 1A, beat Elkton 52-6. In a game that would seemingly be one to forget, everyone remembers one particular play.

"I told her that when she got into high school that I'm going to put you on the field and there is going to be some guy on an opposing team that is either going to not take you for granted or say a derogatory comment or something like that and when that person does that I want you to pancake them," said Hughes.

"So we were at Camas and I put her in there and I think it must have been the fourth quarter," Hughes continued. "And she lined up against, and I mean this kid was, oh I guess 180, 190 pounds. And she came up perfect. Perfect skill, perfect technique and everything right in the chest plate, turned him and next thing you know he's right on his back."

"She gets ahold of this kid, rolls him over and puts him on his back on the ground. Just watching that on film is cool stuff," said Shaw. "I mean, it means she's all in and that's the exciting part of it. She's really a football player."

"It's funny because against Camas I ended up right next to her and witnessed the whole thing and was like, 'Oh god,'" said Jesse Abraham, a senior captain on Elkton. "When she flat backed that kid we were all like, 'Oh wow.'"

"And the referee goes oh, a couple adjectives you can't say, and he goes, 'Oop sorry.' And then I guess one of the coaches from Camas goes, 'I told ya, I told ya.' So I mean, if you underestimate her that's a mistake," said Hughes.

"I love it when they realize that I'm a girl and that I'm kicking their butts," said Tayla.



Tayla chases down and sacks Prospect Charter's quarterback during a game on September 29.

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GOLF Scores

Middlefield Men's Club Monday 10/9/2017 Game: 2M Points

First Place (tie): 97

David Morris, Keith Rowling, Al Nelson, Dave Tooker

Third Place: 96

Jack Doleman, Gary Sparks, Leon Hayes, Larry Strickland

Fourth Place: 94

Richard Vargas, Russell Bryce, Jim Wamsley, Don Hanly

First Place (tie): 97

Frank LaCosse, Dallas Doudna

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David Morris, Keith Rowling, Al Nelson, Dave Tooker

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Richard Vargas, Russell Bryce, Jim Wamsley, Don Hanly

Fifth Place: 93

Larry Emery, Todd Dennis, Don Perkins, Peter Wold,

Low Gross:

Gary Sparks 71, Dallas Doudna 73, Tim Martin 73

Low Net:

Leon Hayes 56, Russell Bryce 59, Dave Tooker 61, Don Hanly 62, Darrell Lee 62

Middlefield Men's Club
Thursday 10/12/2017
Game: 2M Best Ball

Fourth Place (tie): -15

Frank Gates, David Morris, Al Nelson, Dave Tooker

First Place (tie): -20

Jake Cox, Gary Ingram, Darrell Lee, Pat Rickard

First Place (tie): -20

Ricky Ambrose, Bob McCarty, Gary Sparks, Russell Bryce BD

Low Gross

Gary Rider 75, Jake Cox 75

Low Net

Leon Hayes 60, Bob McCarty 64, Dave Tooker 65, Gary Rider 65

Closest to the Pin

#7 Russell Bryce
#14 Frank Gates

First Place (tie): -20

Jake Cox, Gary Ingram, Darrell Lee, Pat Rickard

First Place (tie): -20

Ricky Ambrose, Bob McCarty, Gary Sparks, Russell Bryce BD

Low Gross

Gary Rider 75, Jake Cox 75

Low Net

Leon Hayes 60, Bob McCarty 64, Dave Tooker 65, Gary Rider 65

Closest to the Pin

#7 Russell Bryce
#14 Frank Gates

Fourth Place (tie): -15

Russell Bryce, Jerry Pennington, Jim Wamsley, Dave Tooker BD

Low Gross

Gary Rider 75, Jake Cox 75

Low Net

Leon Hayes 60, Bob McCarty 64, Dave Tooker 65, Gary Rider 65

Closest to the Pin

#7 Russell Bryce
#14 Frank Gates

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