

KEEPER OF THE GOAL

Riggan chases dream on ice, plays with Winterhawks high school league in Portland

By Lukas Eggen

The Itemizer-Observer

INDEPENDENCE — From the moment she skates onto the ice, Central senior Keighlee Riggan is not her usual self.

As a goalie in the Portland Winterhawks' varsity high school hockey league, Riggan isn't worried about school or friends. Her mind is focused on one thing — stopping the puck.

"When you're out there, it's like nothing else matters," Riggan said. "The first thing I think is I better not screw this up. Then, I make sure I'm in the right position and I just remind myself to just do what you do."

That passion for hockey is common in the Riggan household, where the sport isn't just a hobby — it defines them.

"When I was little, before we moved to Oregon from Central Washington, some of my earliest memories are skating on a frozen lake and watching Hockey Night in Canada on CBC with my dad, John" Keighlee said. "I really became a big fan in my early teens when the U.S. won gold in Lake Placid, like most Americans."

That love of hockey has been passed down, and Keighlee is looking to take her passion to a new level.

From almost the moment she could walk, Riggan has been skating.

"I was on roller blades since I was really young because it was a fun thing to do," she said.

Her older brother began playing hockey in Corvallis when Riggan wanted her chance.

"There was a roller hockey league in Corvallis that my older brother played in," Riggan said. "I was jealous of all the attention he was getting so I



COURTESY OF KEIGHLEE RIGGAN
Keighlee Riggan plays goalie in the Portland Winterhawks' varsity high school team. She says the playing the position is all about strategy and quick thinking.

started playing there when I was about 6."

Two years later, Riggan tried being a goalie for the first time.

"I was excited," Riggan said. "I think my parents were like, 'she can try it but she won't like it.' The joke's on them."

At age 10, Riggan was invited to play goalie for a

girls hockey squad in Portland, but her season was cut short because of an injury.

"I think her passion really took hold after she broke her arm at age 10 and couldn't play for half the season," John said.

The injury only served to fuel Riggan's love of hockey.

"The following season her competitiveness, focus and ability took off to a whole new level," John said. "She won multiple tournament game MVPs and her travel team won a couple of tournaments and finished second in a few more that year."

It turns out she was just getting started.



COURTESY OF KEIGHLEE RIGGAN
Keighlee Riggan battles to protect the goal.

Since joining the Winterhawks high school league, Riggan has helped her squad to an impressive string of success.

Playing for Team Neely, Riggan posted two shutouts over three games for a .958 save percentage as they won the state championship.

It's the second-straight state title for Team Neely and the third straight championship game appearance. Riggan has been starting goaltender for all three state title games.

Her success in goal stems from her ability to see plays develop before they happen and to adjust her position quickly, without overreacting.

"It's strategic I guess," Riggan said. "There are a lot of mind games. You have to make sure you're in the right spot. But it's fun when you get a shutout. It's like you saved the day kind of a feeling."

The journey isn't always easy. During the high school season, which runs from September through February, Riggan makes the trek up to Portland each practice day after school gets out.

And while she enjoys the company of her team-

mates, her friends back home rarely get a chance to see her play.

"It's weird because no one is there to watch me," Riggan said. "They all want to know about it, but it's so far away that I don't expect them to (make it to my games)."

She doesn't let that get her down and hopes to continue playing hockey after high school. She recently attended a skills camp in Colorado and has been looking at colleges on the East Coast.

Riggan tries to keep a positive attitude in the competitive world of hockey.

"The pressure can get overwhelming," Riggan said. "I have to take a step back and remember that I'm doing this for me. I'm doing this to have fun."

Not that she's rushing it, but Riggan already has plans to stay with the game as a coach after she's done blocking the goal.

Even though Polk County lacks an official hockey program, Riggan encourages any young player to just get out and skate.

"That's where it all starts," Riggan said. "That's where people get their dreams. That's where I had my dreams begin."

Coaches tackle safety through 'Heads Up' program

By Lukas Eggen

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POLK COUNTY — The OSAA is joining attempts to make football safer for youth athletes. Beginning in 2016, high school coaches must be certified in the USA Football's High School Heads Up program.

OSAA recommends coaches be certified for the 2015 season, something that many local schools are acting on.

Dallas coach Tracy Jackson attended a Player Safety Coach (PSC) clinic Saturday in Eugene and said he learned valuable information to trickle down throughout youth football leagues.

"Sometimes I think you want to have a program from youth kids to high school kids running the same offense and things like that," Dallas coach Tracy Jackson said. "One of the things they emphasized is this is way more important than that."

"This is about fundamentals staying the same, hearing the same thing every year so they can master skills every year. Heads Up wants to make sure the game is as safe as possible."

The Heads Up program focuses on tackling and blocking tech-



Coaches are learning how to teach students to be safer when making tackles in football.

niques, as well as concussion recognition and response, heat preparedness and hydration, sudden cardiac arrest and proper equipment fitting.

"There are some really great progressions for teaching blocking

and tackling," Jackson said. "It's very similar to what we do already. We are going to share with the youth coaches and get us all teaching good fundamentals."

Central coach Shane Hedrick said the Panthers have taken steps

in the past to teach players safer techniques.

"The Seattle Seahawks produced and supplied a tackling video that was enforced by USA Football," Hedrick said. "We showed this to our football players

prior to the 2014 season."

Hedrick said Central's coaches will be certified in January of next year.

The key to the program's success will be getting coaches on board at every level, Jackson said.

"Let's all teach this the same way," Jackson said. "The kids will know how to do things the right way from day one. Let's make the game more fun and less worrisome for parents and coaches."

Each high school will nominate a PSC who will be responsible for implementing the Heads Up program within an organization.

Having the Heads Up football program take root in Oregon is a positive development, Jackson said.

Although it may take a little getting used to for some coaches, he said he knows it is something that will benefit everyone.

"I've been a coach for a long, long time," Jackson said. "Your perspective changes from when you first get in. Like in life, you get wiser over time. You start to see things that are good and some that aren't so good. We want to whittle this down and let's discard the things that aren't good, even if it's what we were taught."

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Junior baseball places fourth

Central Senior American Junior Baseball Organization took fourth place out of 12 teams at the JBO state tournament held in Corvallis July 23-26. Coaches were Timm Cable, Mario Lopez and Matt Holiday.

MARIO LOPEZ/for the Itemizer-Observer