

Jackson honors Eskridge, Rathbun

Wolfpack's Athletes of the Year have strong personalities

June 22, 2007

By David Pan

Enterprise sports editor

Brittany Eskridge and Tylor Rathbun made the most of their physical talents to become standouts in their respective sports.

But in many ways what their respective coaches will miss the most about Jackson High School's Athletes of the Year are the strong personalities they brought to their teams.

Eskridge made an immediate impression on head coach Jeannie Thompson and the Wolfpack girls basketball team when she transferred to the school two years ago.

"She instantly was part of the family," Thompson said. "She didn't take any time to get acclimated. She made friends with the girls within minutes of meeting them."

That trait of making connections with people is a major part of Eskridge's personality.

"She's a very outgoing, personable, energetic person," Thompson said. "She's one of those people who literally has friends from every genre of life. ... She literally knows five to 10 people at every gym."

Eskridge describes herself as the "nut" on every team she's been on, but she added that "I knew how to play. I knew how to be serious at the right time."

The lanky 6-foot-2 center also brought size and athleticism to the Wolfpack and was the missing link that enabled the team to be competitive at the state level, Thompson said.

The Timberwolves advanced to the state tournament for the first time in school history during Eskridge's junior season and then took eighth place at state a year later.

"She's obviously physically dominating at 6-2," Thompson said. "She can run just as fast as a guard. She can jump higher than most male athletes. That particular strength carried her through both volleyball and basketball."

Eskridge's talents are leading her to Oregon State, where she will be playing basketball.

That goal of playing at the next level was a driving force in Eskridge's life.



Enterprise/CHRIS GOODENOW

Tylor Rathbun (left) and Brittany Eskridge were named Jackson High School Athletes of the Year for 2006-07. Rathbun played football, wrestled and also participated in track. Eskridge was a standout on the basketball and volleyball teams.

"It helped me stay focused," Eskridge said. "It kept me determined. I wanted to get a scholarship and I put my heart into it. It gave me the chance to strive for something all the time."

Initially, Eskridge was considering two schools in California but a visit to Oregon State changed her mind. It was as if everything fell into place as Eskridge was drawn to the atmosphere of the campus as well as by the coaching staff and players.

"They are an up-and-coming team," Eskridge said. "They won my heart. I knew it would be a good fit for me."

Thompson expects the first two years at Oregon to be a major transition period for the Jackson senior but is confident that by the end of her college career, Eskridge will be among the top centers in the Pac-10.

"A couple of years of fine-tuning her skills and she'll be right there to lead the conference," Thompson said.

In her two years at Jackson, Eskridge made significant strides in her game. As a junior, Eskridge had a lot of raw, untapped talent.

"She came back as a senior a different player," Thompson said. "She had that seasoned veteran feel to her. She was a lot more powerful under the basket."

As one of the few seniors on the basketball team, Eskridge was someone the younger players turned to if they had questions or problems.

Her time with Jackson should be good preparation for what Eskridge hopes is a career as an elementary school teacher. Eskridge would like to eventually teach at the fourth/fifth grade level, an age when teachers can have a major impact on children's lives.

"I feel that my calling in my life is helping them get started in their lives," Eskridge said.

When Jackson head football coach Joel Vincent thinks about Tylor Rathbun, the words gritty and tough come to mind.

Rathbun, who also was a wrestler and a thrower/jumper in track, started on the offensive and defense line for two years.

"He's a kid that made himself into a good football player through a lot of hard work," Vincent said. "He has a legendary status for his efforts in the weight room. He spent a ton of time to make himself better."

At 6-foot-1, 220 pounds, Rathbun, like the rest of the Jackson line, generally was smaller than many of the players he went up against in the Western Conference South Division.

"He was a real important part of our offense," Vincent said. "His hard work made him a good lineman in this league. Week in and week out he was asked to block and take on guys who were 30 to 40 pounds heavier."

Vincent looked to Rathbun to set an example for his fellow seniors and the underclassmen.

"He was one of those guys who was kind of genuinely and universally liked by his teammates, not only by the seniors but the younger players," Vincent said. "He was good role model, a good leader."

On the field, Rathbun had a fiery personality. Off the field, he was more laid back, Vincent said.

Rathbun said he would like to be remembered as "someone who goes out there, works hard and doesn't mess around."

Rathbun's favorite sport was football. He dabbled briefly with wrestling in middle school and resumed the sport two years ago to stay in shape for football. Rathbun found track to be an ideal way to keep busy in the spring.

That Rathbun was a three-sport athlete is an indication of his love of competition.

"I think he's a kid who likes to compete," Vincent said. "He likes to be out there with the other kids."

Sports has always been an important part of Rathbun's life and it's had a huge impact on his personal development.

"I've played sports since I was 5," Rathbun said. "It's made me who I am as a person. It's taught me about being a leader, how to be respectful of people and just how to work as a team."

Rathbun hasn't settled on what he'll be doing after high school, though he is looking at going to Everett Community College. A future in education is a possible way for Rathbun to stay connected to sports.

"I might end up being a teacher just so I can coach," he said.