

### **Taylor Tvedt, Assistant Activities Director**

On February 4th, we celebrated National Girls & Women In Sports Day! It was a great opportunity to recognize the achievements of our female student-athletes and coaches. On this day and every day, we celebrate our girls and recommit to continuing our efforts to empower girls and women in sports here at White Bear Lake Area High School.

Personally, I shared how sports have played an integral role in my life. I'm grateful that my positions as an Activity Director and coach allow me to continue using the unique power of sports to empower girls and breakdown barriers for more women to coach. I truly believe that sports teach invaluable lessons in leadership, self-advocacy, confidence, and resilience. It's crucial we invest in our girls' programs to retain women coaches so our female student-athletes can reap those benefits with role models leading the way.

To help us further elevate NGWSD, we asked coaches and student-athletes to share their responses to any of following questions:

1. How has participating in sports impacted your life;
2. What are the benefits of girls participating in sports;
3. Why do you play/coach;
4. Why should we celebrate this day;
5. How can people support girls sports/achievements at WBLAHS

### **Chloe Theissen, Girls Tennis, Basketball, and Flag Football Athlete**

Growing up playing sports has been everything for me. Sports are where I have built so many positive relationships with coaches, teammates and other athletes. Additionally, sports have taught me countless life lessons including mental and physical toughness, overcoming challenges, discipline, leadership and the ability to work with others. Overall, some of my favorite life memories have come from playing sports.

### **Paige Downey, Varsity Hockey Athlete**

1. Growing up playing sports has taught me many valuable life lessons such as perseverance, teamwork, time management, and dedicating time to improving my skills. I think playing sports has taught me to be able to both recognize other people's strengths, celebrate them, and find ways to leverage them for the benefit of the team. I play hockey because I like pushing myself to get better every single day and because I love the game.

2. I think there are so many benefits for both girls and women to compete in sports. Sports teach many valuable life lessons and resilience. I like becoming both physically stronger as well as mentally tough. My team is like my family and I love the camaraderie that we have. We support each other both on and off the ice, and build friendships that are lifelong.

3. Only a few generations ago there were limited competitive sports for girls. It is important that we keep up the momentum and build on the efforts that have created opportunities for girls/women to participate in sports, especially at higher levels. I think that people can support

girls' sports and achievements here at WBLAHS by going to the games/events and supporting them on social media.

### **Josie Guidinger, Tennis & Alpine Ski Athlete**

“Sports have always been a constant part of my life, and many of my favorite memories come from being part of a team. They’ve taught me how to handle pressure, learn from mistakes, and keep pushing myself. I play sports because I enjoy the challenge and the environment, but also because I’m really grateful for the teammates and coaches who have supported me along the way.”

### **Lisa Setterlund, Assistant Girls Basketball Coach**

Sports were the first place I ever felt passion. I loved the competition, but even more than that, I loved witnessing others push past what they thought were their limits and accomplish things they never believed were possible. The lessons I learned on the court—resilience, accountability, trust, and belief—shaped me far beyond athletics; they became the foundation of who I am as an adult.

As a high school and college athlete, the relationships I built with my coaches changed my life. They saw potential in me before I fully saw it in myself, and their influence still guides the way I lead, support, and show up for others. I coach today because I believe deeply in that legacy. I want to be the person who creates a space where young athletes feel challenged, supported, and empowered to discover strengths they didn’t know they had—on the court and beyond.

### **Mackenzie Leverty, Head Girls Volleyball Coach**

#### **1. How did growing up playing sports impact your life/what are some benefits for girls to compete?**

Growing up playing sports had a big impact on my life. It taught me life lessons such as time management, discipline, how to work hard and the importance of being a good teammate. I believe that for girls, especially those who compete in sports, there are great benefits which include leadership, self confidence and resilience.

#### **2. Why is it important to keep girls in sports and women coaching?**

It is important to keep girls in sports to continue to develop their confidence, resilience and leadership. These skills will carry into the classroom, their relationships and careers forming a positive channel during developmental years. It is as equally important to have women coaching as they serve as role models for female athletes. Women coaches in positions of authority helps to normalize leadership and reinforces a sense of belonging and empowerment in competitive sports.

#### **3. Why do you coach?**

I coach Girls' Volleyball because I love watching the athletes grow both on and off the court into the young women that they are. Not only am I coaching skills and strategies on the court, but

also coaching life lessons for life beyond volleyball. I enjoy being able to mentor the players, build trust, celebrate success, help them overcome setbacks and watch them mature into young women. Watching them leave the program more confident, stronger and proud of who they are is so rewarding as a coach.

#### **4. Why should we celebrate female athletes and recognize National Girls & Women In Sports Day? How can people support girls sports/achievements here at WBLAHS?**

We should celebrate female athletes because it shows girls that they belong in the competitive nature of sports. We can support girls sports and achievements here at WBLAHS by continuing to attend games, highlight their accomplishments and build a culture of support from the stands cheering on our female athletes.

#### **Stefanie Helmer, WBLAHS Teacher & Former Collegiate Athlete**

##### **1. How did growing up playing sports impact your life? I grew up in rural North Dakota.**

At recess, I dominated sports. They called me Stevie instead of Stef because well.....at the time....they didn't see girls as athletes. So, I went with it. Things have sure changed for the better!

It was an expectation that my 2 younger sisters and I played sports. My Dad pushed us to be the best athletes we could be in a local area. We would be dribbling that ball on the trailer park gravel roads, back and forth. HA! In the late 80s, my dad was brave enough to call the athletic director to ask if I could wrestle on the team. I waited by the phone because I really wanted to wrestle. But, at that time, it was unheard of. I was disappointed when the athletic director said no. That was one of my few best dad moments. I was very proud of my dad for asking though. He always taught me to "Never be afraid to ask. If you get rejected, so what. At least you tried." My Mom taught me humility and social skills. Humility CAN mesh with being competitive.

Now, women's wrestling is soooo cool and growing so fast! My daughter, Jaycie, started off as a wrestler at age 5 and quit at 5th grade, but that sport taught her a lot. Wrestling taught her discipline at a young age. It also is a sport now that teaches the youth boys to respect your opponent, no matter what...because that girl is gonna whoop your butt (at a youth level) and even in some upper-level cases now.

I played basketball, and I absolutely loved it. We were 0-18 (Yes, I said 0-18) when I was an 8th grader, and then I was part of the upward movement. By my senior year, we almost made it to state, losing by only 4 points.

I didn't have access to AAU at the time, and I didn't know what it was. I accepted that I wasn't good enough for college ball after my senior year. I would find some other sports.

I wanted to continue to play sports in college, so I found the Women's Rugby Club at St. Cloud State and that was a game changer in my life! I then played with the Twin Cities Amazons until

I was 31 years old. Afterwards, I coached the North Suburban Girls Rugby Club (mostly made up of Blaine, Mounds View, Fridley, and Columbia Heights girls) for 2 years.

### **Benefits for girls to compete:**

- Learning to work with others
- Leadership capabilities
- How to deal with upsets
- Learning how to hold yourself AND your teammates accountable
- Demonstrating responsibility and showing up for others
- Collaborating
- Active listening to a coach
- Learning how to be assertive
- Becoming self-aware of your strengths
- Learning to trust teammates

## **2. Why is it important to keep girls in sports and women coaching?**

Humans are social creatures, and sports are a great way to participate! I would say friendships! Learning how to engage with others. Plus, letting off steam. There is a lot of energy that needs to be released at the end of the day, and a great way is through sports.

I think it's important because sports give an outlet for women to now have VOICE and POWER! Women are starting to get the respect they have deserved the WHOLE TIME, but in the United States, we love our sports. SO, if that's the avenue where we're gonna be heard, I say LET'S GO FOR IT!!!!

Women Coaching: This is a barrier that is still being worked on. Coaching is a system of power, and men still find ways to dominate this area. It doesn't have to be this way though, and it is changing. I'm excited for Emily Shilson to take on the Women's Wrestling Program at St. Michaels Albertville High School. Yes, a woman coach!

Women CAN hold each other accountable. Women CAN know all of the knowledge it takes to win games! Women CAN be assertive! Women CAN possess leadership qualities that are essential to sports! This goes for women coaching men's teams too.

## **4. Why should we celebrate this day?**

When you have sexist, old, white men from rural areas wanting to watch the Women's NCAA Basketball Tournament instead of the men's tournament, that's when things are changing! I've seen them want to turn on Collegiate Fastpitch women's softball instead of a baseball game at the bar. They talk women's stats and recruitment, etc.

I HAVE WITNESSED THIS! We are in the midst of a cultural shift!!!! Y EES! So, let's keep going and talking about these moments!