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HIGH SCHOOLS >> Scholastic Spotlight

Hitting a high note

Sweet Home's Stephanie Izard leads a busy life being a standout jumper in track and field and a conference all-state tuba player for the school's wind ensemble

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Stephanie Izard has struck the right chord in balancing academics along with being a musician and a track-and-field standout.
James P. McCoy / Buffalo News

Stephanie Izard couldn't decide between being an athlete or a musician, so she did the next best thing and chose both.

While her peers were falling into the trap of specializing in one sport or activity, Izard found time for both rehearsals and practice. As a member of Sweet Home's indoor track team, she is a clear favorite to win the Section VI title in the high jump. As a member of her school's wind ensemble, she made conference all-state as a tuba player.

"If I had to pick, I don't know what I what I would do," she said. "I just enjoy doing everything, and I get really into it, and it's hard to stop doing any of it."

Izard strikes the balance between being comfortably busy and over-scheduled. And while she can jump and hit the high notes with the best of them, she saves her best performances for the classroom. Izard carries a 101 average taking AP classes. She said she studies an average of two hours per night. She will attend Cornell in the fall where she will major in bio-chemistry and continue her track career.

"My parents always taught me, I always get all my work done before I do anything else," she said. "I'm used to this [pace], I've been doing it for so long."

At last weekend's invitational at Virginia Tech, Izard faced the girl ranked No. 2 in the country in the high jump. She came into the event supremely confident and considered herself a national contender. Izard beat her in the final clearing a school record 5-foot-7, which currently leads Section VI and is No. 2 in the state. The competition doesn't get much better.

"There's not a lot of meets where I have people jumping up there with me," she said. "It was nice to have her push me," said Izard. "A lot of it for me this year is my form over the bar. It's gotten a lot better. Last year my head wasn't back, little things like that I've been working on."

While Izard commands the spotlight on two stages, there's another whiz kid in the family. Her freshman sister, Melanie, is a player as well. She may be three years younger, but she's already two inches taller, and competes in the triple jump and 600. She won the Western New York Freshman title in the 600 a couple weekends ago at Lancaster. Her academic average is a lofty 99.8 and she plays the French horn.

"Music you practice things over and over, and it's always going to be the same thing and the same notes," said Melanie. "In track you're going to have different races and you're going to have to train for different things."

Both sisters know the school year can go by as quickly as a 55-meter dash, so they're determined to make the most of their one year as teammates. When they pass each other in the hallway during school it's a smile and a wave. At track practice, they stay focused.

"It's kind of cool to have people like know me because my sister is such a good example, and then people think I'm going to be good," said Melanie, "so I give them a good first impression."

Stephanie is the undeniable leader of the Panthers and a team captain. Her three Section VI titles in outdoor track have earned her plenty of respect. She expects a lot from herself this year at states after finishing sixth last year in the high jump at 5-5. Her 36-foot-9 inches in the triple jump could also do some damage. Melanie's goals aren't as lofty, but someday they will be.

"Her legs are way longer than mine and she's already up where I was as a freshman, and she's already pushing me," said Stephanie.

Sweet Home indoor track coach Brian Lombardo witnesses the unbreakable bond between the Izard sisters everyday. He said the girls respect each other's strengths with Stephanie in the jumps and Melanie in the middle distances. But that drive has to come from somewhere.

"It starts with a good family background, and they have solid support behind them, and they're pretty talented all the way through," he said. "And it's not a mistake. They work hard. Stef learned about 1 1/2-2 years ago that if she really started to lift [weights], things would change. She went to a different level."

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