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Teams' work helps Eagles

By Joey Falkoff

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Editor's Note: This is the second part of a three part series focusing on the success of Colby High in winter sports. In this edition, we will look at some of the reasons behind the renaissance of Colby winter sports this year.

Colby High having great athletes like Lissa Mazanec, Ethan Stover and Nick Kriss in the fold certainly helps, but pulling off possibly the greatest winter sports season is the culmination of many different factors according to many local observers.

In the last 10 years, the Eagle winter sports programs have experienced a renaissance of sorts after a period from 1988 to 1997 when the boys basketball team failed to reach state, the girls team reached state only once (1990) and the wrestling team never finished higher than seventh at state or second in the league.

Colby school board member Kevan Taylor, who has lived in Colby since 1992, believes the turning point occurred after the boys basketball team won state in 1999 and the wrestling team won it in 2001.

"After the boys won it in '99, the MAYB program got big. When wrestling won it, the kids wrestling program developed some big numbers," said Taylor. "When a lot of those kids got to high school, there was a lot out for wrestling. That maybe hurt basketball a bit. Now, the numbers are good in both sports."

The boys basketball and wrestling programs started the year with about 35 athletes. The girl's team had close to 25.

"There's a good balance there right now," said Colby athletic director Larry Gabel.

Gabel took over as athletic director prior to the 2006-2007 school year and also credits the youth programs for the recent surge in winter sports.

"It's a combination of a number of things," said Gabel. "The Kids Wrestling Club and MAYB have been helpful. There's also been a nice progression at the middle school level. Then, we have some quality coaches at the high school level. It starts young with the kids building on those fundamentals to where they can compete on a much higher level when they get older. A lot of people deserve credit for that."

The Colby Kids Wrestling has been around since the 1970s, but in the last decade has really started to take off.

Club President Blake Arnberger says there are currently 78 kids signed up, which doesn't include the kids wrestling in high school right now.

"We're one of the top five kids wrestling programs in the state," said Arnberger. "The last three years we've had the most or tied for the most kids at the state tournament. We've got great coaching. They start off learning

good fundamentals. There's a lot of support from the community with the college team coming to help us out. A lot of these high school kids went through the kids program."

Eagle head wrestling coach Matt Sims says the community support continues even after the kids arrive at the high school.

"The parents I have now have put in a lot of practice time and a lot of road miles hauling these kids to tournaments," said Sims.

Arnberger also has noticed the evolution of wrestling from just a winter sport to something kids do year-round.

"You're starting to see more kids wrestle during the summer," said Arnberger. "We're starting to get our weight program together. We have more kids involved lifting in the summer."

It's not just the summer wrestling and basketball programs that have made the difference.

Colby booster club member Gary Adrian said the variety of activities there is for kids to do together also breeds team chemistry at a young age.

"Swimming is big and keeps 'em in shape. There's also not many baseball programs for kids as good as Colby's," said Adrian. "The kids play together all the time, become friends and know and understand each other."

Or maybe the success is part of a more recent change.

Colby KXXX radio station manager Mike Fell says Gabel's arrival two years ago has been the biggest difference.

"Larry Gabel is building a culture of success. He deserves a lot of credit and recognition," said Fell. "It's no coincidence there's been very real improvement in all sports. It's not even close right now. Colby is towering over winter sports in the region."

Now the question is, can this success sustain?

Taylor believes it will. "Right now Colby High has so many good athletes it can be successful in both," he said. "Part of that is the league we're playing is struggling. It's harder for Hoxie, Oberlin and Oakley to fill three really good teams."

History has shown that only rarely has Colby been good at all three sports in one year.

While Gabel is confident these type of years can continue, he warns that even the best programs have their up's and down's.

"Colby has enough numbers to sustain successful programs, but very few programs and in fact none are at the top year in and year out," said Gabel.

"Iowa in wrestling, UCLA in basketball and Oklahoma and Nebraska in football all experienced down years before they got back to the top. There's a lot to be said that it's cyclic."

In that case, Colby fans should enjoy what's taking place in 2008.



KEVIN JOHNSON/Colby Free Press

A Colby Resident tries in vain to keep up with falling snow Tuesday afternoon in the 800 block of South Lincoln Avenue. Snow accumulated to nearly eight inches by Tuesday night.

Snowfall creates road hazards

By Kevin Johnson

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With this week's snowfall also came the threat of hazardous roads, road closures and weather related accidents in and around Thomas County and the City of Colby.

A spokesperson for the Kansas Highway Patrol said that, though there were a lot of interstate and highway delays due to weather related accidents, there were no road closures due to weather.

"The wind blowing combined with the heavy snowfall caused a lot of drifting and some slick road conditions," the spokesperson said.

According to the Kansas Highway Patrol Online Crash Log, there were two weather related accidents on I-70 starting Monday night around 8 p.m. approximately 13 miles west of Colby, when the snow first started to fall, and at 9:18 a.m. Tuesday morning approximately 12 miles west of Colby. Injuries were reported in both accidents but neither were fatal.

In Thomas County snow accumulation tallied about 8 inches in the two day span that, coupled with drift winds, have kept Thomas County road crews busy clearing streets and piling snow.

"We are working on them," Thomas County Director of Public Works, Chris Bieker said referring to the snow packed roads. "We kept after it all day yesterday trying to keep up."

Thomas County and the city of Colby road crews worked all day yesterday and early this morning, coming in at 4 a.m. to try to get the

roads clear. The road crews have spent most of today working on major snow routs such as Franklin Ave.

"I think possible they might be finished clearing the roads by Friday," Bieker said.

Though the roads have been slick and hazardous, a spokesperson with the Colby Police Department said that there have been no reported accidents in town due to the snow as of yet, but encouraged motorists to exercise caution while driving on icy, snow covered roads.

Teen killed in car accident on Range

By Kevin Johnson

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A one-car accident Monday near Colby Community College resulted in the death of a 19-year-old from Grainfield.

At approximately 7:41 p.m. Monday, Colby Police Officers were dispatched to the 1200 block of South Range Avenue to a car crash and possible injury accident.

According to the accident report, upon arrival at the scene officers found that a 1998 Chevrolet Lumina crashed head-on into a tree. In the vehicle was a single male occupant, who would later be identified as Dustin Armstrong.

The Colby Fire Department arrived to extricate the victim and send to Citizens Medical Center. Armstrong was later flown to Swedish Medical Center in Denver, Colo.

At approximately 6 a.m. Tuesday, officials at the Colby Police Department were advised Armstrong had died from his injuries while at Swedish Medical Center.

According to witnesses and evidence presented at the scene, it appeared the vehicle had been southbound on Range and then swerved across the median and northbound lanes.

The vehicle then entered the Colby Community College property where it struck a tree.

Gary Shull of the Colby Police Department said the speed of the vehicle at the time of the accident could not be confirmed. It has not yet been determined if alcohol was a factor.

Shull said the accident is still under investigation and medical causes may have contributed.

"From what I have heard," Shull said, "we haven't been able to rule out that the accident was medically related."



KEVIN JOHNSON/Colby Free Press

A broken sign is all that remains from the fatal car accident involving a Colby Community College student Monday night. The accident occurred at the 1200 block of South Range on the Colby Community College Campus.

According to Shull, Armstrong's injuries included a badly broken leg and head trauma, as well as

various internal injuries. Armstrong was a student at Colby Community College.

Activity center design on display Thursday

After months of discussion and plans, Colby's Multipurpose Activity Center (MAC) board is revealing its building layout for the first time to the public at the Wellness Fair.

"We are really excited to show people what is to come and to hear

feedback from our community," said board member Jada Tubbs.

The Wellness Fair will be held from 5-9 p.m. Thursday at Colby Community College's Student Union. The project, which has been about two years in the works is projected to be completed in

2 phases. Phase 1 focuses on the land, building and indoor entertainment. Phase 2 will be the outdoor activities and a gym. Proposed amenities include large meeting rooms, a walking track and exercise equipment and a recording studio. Committee mem-

bers said what is inside the center will appeal to a variety of people.

Phase 1 is estimated at \$2.5 million and Phase 2 is estimated \$1.75 million. The board is hoping to start construction in early 2009.

For information, go online to www.themacolby.com

Briefly

Remote car races Sunday

The Racing for Christ Car Club, also known as the RC Club, welcomes everyone to attend its next remote control car races, from 2 to 5 p.m., Sunday, at the First Baptist Church, 615 Webster, Colby. "No experience is necessary and we have many remote control cars available for those ages 10 and older who would like to learn," said Kent Higerd, coordinator. For questions, call 462-3440.

Food orders Due Monday

Orders for the February Prairie Land Food (formerly the Share program) will be taken until Monday, Feb. 11. The program requires participants to volunteer two hours of service in order to qualify for the food orders. To order or find out food specials, call Marguerette Edmundson, 460-8640; Gene Grif-

fin, 460-3579; Mary Schroeder, 462-7525 or Linda Hagan, (800) 298-1989.

Genesis sets meeting

The annual meeting of Genesis-Thomas County, Inc. will be held at 7 p.m., Thursday, Feb. 21, in the conference room at the Thomas County Office Complex, 350 S. Range Avenue in Colby. The public is invited to attend.

Daffodil driveunderway

American Cancer Daffodil Days is coming and orders may be placed from now until Thursday, Feb. 21. The daffodils will be delivered to Someplace Special in Colby around the first week in March, said Cathy Harrison, coordinating the event. Prices range from a bunch for \$10 to bouquet with vase, \$15. In

addition, there is a "Bear and A Bunch," for \$25 and one-half and full cases of daffodils from \$250-\$400. For questions or to order, call Harrison at 460-2501; 462-2331; fax: 462-6242 or e-mail: harrison@st-tel.net

Square dancers to meet

The Golden Buckle Square Dance Group will hold its annual soup supper for club members starting at 6:30 p.m., Saturday, at the Colby Community Building. For questions about the group, call Elaine Hurr, 460-2895.

Book sale Saturday

The annual "Book Lover's Sale" will be held from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Saturday, at the Pioneer Memorial Library, 375 W. Fourth St., Colby. Everyone is

welcome and all proceeds from the sale will benefit the library.

Think 'kind' next week

The Thomas County Community Foundation is promoting a "Random Acts of Kindness Week" during the week of Valentine's Day, Feb. 10-16. The challenge to residents, businesses, individuals and non-profit organizations is to perform small charitable deeds for fellow citizens, said Melinda Olson with the foundation. "We are striving for 100 percent Thomas County participation," she said. Examples of random acts of kindness could be to host a "customer appreciation day," give employees an extra break, longer lunch hour or let them leave early, compliment every person that walks in the door, let somebody go in front of you at the store checkout, or write a note of appreciation to co-workers.