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This Eagle flying high

Steve Navaroli



Dover's Jess Walker tries to drive around Red Lion's Mindy Bennett during Friday's game. Walker is a multisport athlete who also makes time to pursue her musical interests and spend time in the great outdoors.

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 (Bil Bowden - YDR)

Jan 23, 2006 — In my continued pursuit of our local standouts, a Dover Area High School student who goes above and beyond in extracurricular activities was brought to my attention.

Like many area athletes, Jess Walker participates in three sports. The junior runs cross country and plays basketball and softball.

She is also a member of the National Honor Society, but what really caught my attention was when I found out that Walker plays trumpet for the Eagles' marching band, too.

It is rare when a student makes the time for both sports and band. Considering how good the Dover band is, it is downright amazing.

You see, I have been covering YAIAA football games for 15 years, and I have seen many outstanding performances by this area's marching bands.

However, I don't remember being as passionate about a performance as I was back in September when I saw Dover's band at

Manheim Central. Just ask my co-workers. I raved about it for weeks.

Their movements and formations were terrific, and they finished by playing right in front of the home stands. They received a standing ovation from the Manheim Central fans.

Their 1970s-themed show featured the likes of Grand Funk Railroad, Simon & Garfunkel and Blood, Sweat & Tears, to name a few. I loved it. I knew all the songs so well.

Of course, I just dated myself by saying that.

Walker thanks Dover band director George Bradshaw for his flexibility in scheduling.

"(Bradshaw) is real lenient with sports," she said. "I go to band practice after (sports). Band practice is 6 to 8, while sports are more after school. He is OK with the sports issue."

Plus, during the winter months marching band does not practice that often, which is a big help because basketball has evening games and practices.

Still, it makes Walker awfully busy. And let's not forget the before-school National Honor Society meetings, either.

Walker qualified for district in cross country, she is the Eagles' leading scorer in basketball, and she was a Daily Record/Sunday News All-Star in softball as sophomore last spring.

And there is another thing that makes Walker stand out above the crowd.

Early morning on the first day of rifle season, she nabbed her first deer - an 11-point buck - on her family's land in Juniata County.



Dover's Jess Walker is sandwiched between Red Lion players Marley Klunk, left, and Mindy Bennett on Friday.

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(Bill Bowden - YDR)

That's right sportsmen and women, *11 points*.

People hunt for years and don't even see a deer like that, much less shoot it. How did she do that?

"I was actually almost not going to get a shot because when you see a deer and you get time to get a shot, your hands are going like this, you are going crazy," she said of her first kill.

The funny thing is, Walker had no idea the buck was that big until she saw it. In fact, she needed her dad, Kevin, and brother, Joshua, to help drag the 150-pound animal out of the woods.

"It was awesome. We went up to it and it was like the best feeling ever," Jess said. "Especially to bring pictures in and show the guys here at school. Everyone was jealous."

She archery hunts as well. Amazing.

"I walked up and said, 'You are not going to believe what you have here,'" proud father Kevin said of finding the deer. "It is awesome. I am still flying high from it."

Saying Walker is a well-rounded young lady would be probably be quite the understatement.

On top of all of these things, we can't forget her performance in the classroom, where she has averaged a 96 on a 100-point scale and is in the top-20 academically in her class.

Obviously, Walker, she is no coach potato and because of it, perhaps one of the greatest moments for Jess' parents was when she finally got that driver's license.

In fact, Kevin Walker joked that the family can now actually cook normal meals rather than having to interrupt dinner to take Jess to another activity.

However, he was quick to add, it has all been worthwhile.

As a parent, I congratulate parents Kevin and Jamie Walker on the terrific job they have done. What a remarkable young lady.

Jess, meanwhile, takes it all in stride.

"It just kind of all falls in place. I don't get too stressed out about the schedule," she said. "I like to be more busy than anything. I would hate to be sitting at home on the coach every night and have nothing to do."

It sure doesn't seem like that is going to happen any time soon. *Steve Navaroli is a sportswriter for the York Daily Record/Sunday News. He can be reached at 771-2060 or snavaroli@ydr.com.*

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