

SPORTS

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From left, Hayfield grads Carrie Rutledge and Maggie Streightiff took a swing at their old playground in Hayfield Tuesday. The duo have stepped up on the college volleyball scene in each of the past two seasons. Photos by Rocky Hulne/sports@austindailyherald.com

Swinging into success

By Rocky Hulne
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HAYFIELD — A pair of Hayfield grads are far from one dimensional, but they have locked their talents into one arena, pushing them to the peak of their potential in a sport they have both grown to love.

Carrie Rutledge and Maggie Streightiff have grown into big time hitters on the college volleyball scene and their roots are forged in versatility from their time as three-sport athletes for the Vikings.

When they wore the blue and gold, Rutledge and Streightiff played in section title games in volleyball and basketball and they played in four state softball tournaments. Now they're focused on volleyball and they have already done some big things at the college level.

"Competing in three sports taught me to be dedicated and to push through," Rutledge said. "Sometimes you go from one sport to the next and it definitely showed me that I can push myself to the limit and I can do just about anything I put my mind to."

Rutledge, who will play volleyball at Division III University of Saint Thomas in the Twin Cities, this fall, was a first team NJCAA All-American in both of her seasons at Rochester Community and Technical College. This past season, she lead the nation with 4.97 kills per set and was second in total kills with 572. RCTC finished with a record of

Hayfield's Rutledge and Streightiff have shined on the volleyball court



Hayfield grads Carrie Rutledge, left, and Maggie Streightiff have excelled on the volleyball court in college after being three-sport athletes for the Vikings.

31-4 overall as the Yellowjackets took fourth in the NJCAA Division III National Tournament. The Tommies finished 30-5 overall last season.

After playing in just six matches in her first year of college volleyball, Streightiff is coming off a breakout sophomore season at Division II Upper Iowa, where she racked up 260 kills and 38 blocks for the Peacocks, who finished 21-9 overall and knocked off No. 1 seeded Northern State University in the Northern Sun Conference Tournament.

Streightiff stayed committed on the court and in the offsea-

son, even after playing a back-up role in her first season with the Peacocks. Now she is ready to step up as a leader for a program on the rise.

"Coming in, I kind of expected (to not play much) and I knew I would have to work my way up to get there. I had to be patient. It was a lot of hard work and I had to trust the process that all of that work was going to pay off," Streightiff said.

Upper Iowa head volleyball coach Aaron Nelson has seen Streightiff grow as a player ever since she arrived on campus.

"Maggie brings a pool of ener-

gy to our team each day off which we all draw at some point. She has an innate ability to disarm you with her sense of humor and her consistent positivity. She is one of the hardest workers on and off the floor as well and is a great leader by example at all times," Nelson said. "We cannot be happier with what Maggie has brought to our group and the university as a whole. We feel fortunate to have her as part of our family and we are looking forward to seeing more great things from her the next two years."

With team activities on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Streightiff and Rutledge have stayed self motivated, working out and doing drills to stay ready for the upcoming season. Streightiff's team has even found ways to do two-hour virtual practices together online.

If things open up, Streightiff and Rutledge are planning on playing together on a summer volleyball team.

Either way, they will remain connected from their time together with the Vikings.

Rutledge drew plenty of Hayfield fans when she played for RCTC and Streightiff even saw some blue and gold when she was playing home games in Fayette, Iowa, which is a two hour drive from Hayfield.

"I am so grateful for growing up in this community," Rutledge said. "They stuck behind us in every single sport and even when I went to RCTC, I still had supporters come in and watch me."

Ball players staying busy in a pandemic

It was in late March when I first noticed that Marcusen Park was no longer empty.

Little by little, small groups of baseball players began showing up and finding their way to the batting cage to get some swings in or take to the outfield to shag some fly balls.

It was a little sense of normality in a time of constant uncertainty under the dark cloud of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Those players didn't have a spring season, and now they won't have a summer season as Austin Post 91 and Austin VFW Post 1216 will not have a schedule; however, the players still found their way to Marcusen on Monday.

Nick Robertson and Kody Bloom, who will both be sophomores in the fall, were two of those players who were getting swings on Monday afternoon. They don't have any games to prepare for, but the return to baseball workouts has brought a sense of duty for the boys of summer who have now been left without a season.

"It's been a lot of sitting



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at home, but we try to stay active," Robertson said. "We've been doing a lot of hitting and keeping our arms loosened up."

Austin went to its first Minnesota Class AAA State Baseball Tournament in nearly three decades last spring and the Legion and VFW squads also went to state that summer. This summer has left players yearning for action and hungry to see a live pitch.

While Bloom knows it will be a long wait before his next bat, he's still hammering away at perfecting his swing this summer.

"It really is horrible, but it's just something you go through. Hopefully next year, it'll be back on," Bloom said. "It's such a team sport and it's really fun making a bond with the people on your team. Taking that out on the field and having chemistry makes you play better as a team."



Nick Robertson takes a swing from the batter's shell at Marcusen Park Monday. BELOW: Kody Bloom of Austin takes a swing. Photos by Rocky Hulne/sports@austindailyherald.com

With Minnesota headed towards Phase III in the COVID-19 recovery plan, there are some rumors that amateur baseball may be played this summer. But for now, those are just rumors and it may very well be an empty summer at Marcusen Park and Dick Seltz Field.

However, if players continue to put in the grind during the down time, Austin may just remain in the winner's circle when next spring arrives.



MLB offers 76-game season, playoffs rise up to 16 teams

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Major League Baseball has made another try to start the coronavirus-delayed season in early July, proposing a 76-game regular season, expanding the playoffs from 10 teams to as many as 16 and allowing players to earn about 75 percent of their prorated salaries.

Players have refused cuts beyond what they agreed to in March shortly after the pandemic began, part of baseball's again acrimonious labor relations. The arduous negotiations have jeopardized plans to hold opening day around the Fourth of July in empty ballparks and provide entertainment to a public still emerging from months of quarantine.

MLB's latest proposal would guarantee 50 percent of players' prorated salaries over the regular season, according to details obtained by The Associated Press.

The proposal would eliminate all free-agent compensation for the first time since the free-agent era started in 1976. It also would forgive 20 percent of the \$170 million in salaries already advanced to players during April and May.

"If the players desire to accept this proposal, we need to reach an agreement by Wednesday," Deputy Commissioner Dan Halem wrote in a letter to union negotiator Bruce Meyer that was obtained by The Associated Press. "While we understand that it is a relatively short time frame, we cannot waste any additional days if we are to have sufficient time for players to travel to spring training, conduct COVID-19 testing and education, conduct a spring training of an appropriate length, and schedule a 76-game season that ends no later than Sept. 27."

"While we are prepared to continue discussion past Wednesday on a season with fewer than 76 games, we simply do not have enough days to schedule a season of that length unless an agreement is reached in the next 48 hours," he added.

There was no immediate response from the union, which is likely to view the plan as a step back because of the large percentage of salaries not guaranteed.

"There's social unrest in our country amid a global pandemic. Baseball won't solve these problems, but maybe it could help," Washington pitcher Sean Doolittle tweeted. "We've been staying ready & we proposed 114 games — to protect the integrity of the game, to give back to our fans & cities, and because we want to play."

"It's frustrating to have a public labor dispute when there's so much hardship. I hate it," he said. "But we have an obligation to future players to do right by them. We want to play. We also have to make sure that future players won't be paying for any concessions we make."

While there is no chance players would accept this proposal as is, the offer dropped the sliding scale teams embraced last month that would have left stars with just a fraction of their expected pay. The latest proposal figures to spark more talks that could lead to opening day at some point in July.

Players agreed March 26 for prorated salaries that depend on games played, part of a deal for a guarantee of service time if the season was scrapped.