George Ferguson Column: We should all try to be more like Taylor

From the Fringe...
By George Ferguson
March 19, 2014

To a gym rat, to a player who’s been shooting hoops her whole life, that’s exactly what basketball becomes. It becomes her life.

But sometimes, life will take some turns and basketball goes back to just being a game she loves. It goes back to something that makes her happy. And after all, that’s what the game is supposed to be about. It’s supposed to fun.

Basketball is fun for Montana State University-Northern junior Taylor Cummings. But Cummings, a former multi-sport star from Belt, is someone who proves there’s much more to life than basketball.

In other words, Taylor is someone we should all aspire to be.

Cummings, who was a finalist for the NAIA’s prestigious Dr. Leroy Wagner Award, which is given to a junior or senior who best represents the five core values of the NAIA’s Champions of Character. Those values are, integrity, respect, responsibility, sportsmanship and servant leadership — community service. And while Cummings wasn’t selected for the award, which was presented at Tuesday night’s Champions of Character banquet at the NAIA national tournament, she is certainly deserving of it.

You see, Cummings isn’t just a great point guard for the Skylights, she isn’t just another great basketball player, she’s so much more than that. She’s a leader, on the floor, in the communities of Havre and Belt, and in the classroom. Cummings is also an example of perseverance.

Taylor lost her father unexpectedly back in 2011. It was a time that no one can put into words. But that difficult moment in her life only inspired Taylor, and now Taylor is inspiring all of us.

“Taylor is a very impressive person,” said her head coach, Chris Mouat. “She has a work ethic that is unmatched. She’s a self-made player. She is a leader in everything she does. She is a person we can all look up to. To see where she started to where she is now, it’s just been incredible and it’s all due to the type of person she is. Taylor is just a really special individual.”

Special doesn’t begin to describe Cummings. She’s a 4.0 GPA student and a Student Ambassador at Northern. She’s on her way to earning a bachelor’s degree in design drafting and another one in Civil Engineering, with a minor in business. She’s looking at graduate school in the near future, and wants to eventually become an architect.

In the community, Cummings has given back to Belt by starting the Play for the Cure Tournament, which raised money for the Susan B. Komen Foundation. She’s ran the tournament the last six years, and it’s been a big success. Cummings has also logged countless community service hours for various causes in both Havre and Belt, all while becoming one of the best point guards in the Frontier Conference.
Yes, Cummings can truly do it all, on and off the floor. But she admits, it hasn’t always been easy, and she couldn’t do it without the tremendous support she’s had along the way.

“The support I’ve had from my family and friends here and in Belt has helped me get to where I am,” she said. “I’ve had great support from everybody, my family, friends, all my teammates. My mom and family get to come to a lot of games and that’s awesome. I’m just very fortunate and lucky to have the support system I have.”

And that support system has helped Cummings tremendously, through the good times, and the dark times she’s had to face. But when you talk to Taylor, even for a minute, you wouldn’t even know she’s been through dark times. She has a huge smile, she’s an uplifting, intelligent and upbeat person, and her positivity is infectious. I’ve seen it first-hand.

And now Cummings will take that big smile, that infectious personality and a darn good basketball game to a height she had yet to reach, the NAIA national tournament. Coming from a Class C school to starting for the Skylights, with all she’s been through, getting to this moment is a dream come true for Cummings, and she’ll be able to share it with everyone who means so much to her. Cummings’ mom and many other supporters will be in the stands today when the Skylights take on Columbia College in the first round.

“It’s just surreal,” she said. “From everything that’s happened in the past four years, to finally get this reward, it means so much to me. It’s a credit to my teammates, who are so amazing and great. Going to the national tournament is something we’ve all been dreaming of and working hard for and now it’s actually happened. It’s just surreal. I really can’t even put it into words what it means to me.”

It might be difficult for Cummings to describe how she feels about ascending to this level in her already brilliant basketball career. But it isn’t hard to describe how any of us that know her, feel about her.

Belt, Havre, Northern and anyone else whose lives she’s touched is lucky to have Taylor Cummings. She’s the type of person who cares, she cares about people. She does things the right way. She’s a role model, she’s an example for people of all ages and from all walks of life. Like Mouat said, Taylor is a special person.

In other words, Taylor Cummings really is a Champion of Character. And that isn’t hard to put into words. In fact, with how special Taylor Cummings is, it’s real easy to do.