



AIA FEATURE STORY By: Don Ketchum

KELLIS BASKETBALL PLAYER KAYLA MACKENZIE MAKES NAME FOR HERSELF

PHOENIX, AZ (February 9, 2009) – Kayla Mackenzie just might be one of the best-kept secrets in Arizona girls high school basketball.

There aren't many who know about the 5-foot-7 junior guard for Raymond S. Kellis in Glendale, but that likely will change if she continues on her current scoring pace and her team goes deep into the Class 4A Division II playoffs.

Entering the final week of the regular season, Mackenzie was averaging 31 points per game (up from 16.5 as a sophomore) and five assists. She was the Skyline Region Player of the Year last season and is a strong candidate again this year for Kellis, which has won two region titles in a row.

Coach Samantha Middagh said her team has a strong backcourt, "a unique group that can rotate and is somewhat interchangeable between shooting and ball-handling. Kayla is our main ball-handler. They try to double-team her, but she can split the defenders, keep going and move the ball down the floor where she can find the open person."

"It's been a good year for us. Everybody works well together and we hope we can keep it going," Mackenzie said.

She tried other spots in her younger days, but something seemed to be missing. She said T-ball was "too slow" and softball was "too boring."

Not basketball. The sport offers a much faster pace and constant movement, just what she likes.

She admitted she "wasn't very good at first," but caught on and has not looked back.

Mackenzie played in youth leagues, often times against boys, which she said made her a better player. She also has played club ball, most recently for the Arizona Swish, which has offered her an opportunity to play against top-notch competition from around the state and nation.

"I have confidence, but you always have to try to improve," Mackenzie said.

"I like to shoot, but I like setting up my teammates just as much, driving with the ball a lot, look for the post players and make the pass. I like the fast pace, because our inside players run the floor very well. It is exciting."

It all starts with defense.

"We take a lot of pride in that," she said.

Middagh said Mackenzie led the team in scoring as a freshman, but was still very quiet. She has become more vocal since and has developed into a leader. She is the only underclassman on the team's leadership council.

"She's great in class and has a good sense of humor," Middagh said.

Mackenzie enjoys academics and said she seldom has had difficulty balancing her schoolwork with athletics. She enjoys medical science and is considering a career as a therapist or athletic trainer or perhaps be involved in sports management.

Middagh is looking forward to having Mackenzie back next year, and making a long run into the upcoming state tournament this year will help continue to build a solid foundation for the program at the young school.

“We’ve worked hard so far, but we have to step it up, make it to the end and finish on top,” Mackenzie said.

And in the process, more people will know who she is.

Have a Story Idea:

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