

Margolis Twins See Careers Culminate at WHS

Written by Ethan Woodhouse
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Having a similarly minded sibling in sport has proven to be an avenue for fostering skill, dedication and success. Within the professional ranks, some

sibling athletes find themselves making national news. From the Harbaugh Bowl last weekend to the Williams sister's

decade long domination of tennis- the list spans all sports and decades.

For the past four years, fans of the Watauga boys and girls basketball teams have seen evidence of this trend on a smaller scale, with twins Ben and Hannah Margolis.

The two are seniors at Watauga High this year, with their prep careers quickly winding down in the next two weeks or so. Their final season has seen successful.

The WHS boys have secured a playoff spot in the men's Class 4-A Northwestern Conference bracket, but at the moment, they are also in a dogfight with South Caldwell for the No.4 seed and home court advantage in the opening round of the conference tournament, which begins at the higher seeds on Monday, February 18.

The girls team currently sits in sixth place, two games behind Hibriten with three games left to secure fourth place and home court advantage in the conference tournament.

With both teams in the heat of a playoff race, the focus is on getting victories, but all of that will change when the season comes to an end.

"You're going to remember the relationships that you've built over the time that you've been in the program," men's coach Rob Sanders said. "Really, in high school athletics, that's what it should be about. The winning is icing on the cake."

As anyone who has played high school sports can attest, the journey is no walk in the park.

Hannah and Ben have faced challenges of all forms in their four years at Watauga.

Ben played varsity under the tutelage of Coach Sanders for the past two years after platooning the junior varsity for as an underclassman. Hannah was made a starter on varsity for Coach Klay Anderson as a sophomore, after one year on the junior varsity.

"Hannah's been through adversity basically each year since she was a sophomore," Coach Anderson said. "She was put through some adversity with some veteran players as she was a sophomore, kind of a little bit of animosity. But sometimes teams have that, when you come in as a younger player and she was tested. But she stuck with us coaches and knew that we stuck with her. She acted with class."

Hannah too admits her first season of varsity basketball had ups and downs, but it didn't prevent her from excelling. She was honored as an all-conference performer as the team's starting point guard. The following year, with the team decimated by injury, Hannah took her talents to the post and was named all-conference once again as well as garnering all-District 11 honors.

"It shows the type of game she has and the respect the other coaches have for her," Coach Anderson said. "Not only is Hannah's ability to play multiple positions a testament to her skill, her willingness to do so provides relief to the coach and leadership to her teammates."

Hannah, and her brother Ben, both play an unselfish brand of ball according to their father, Owen Margolis. Running the point, Hannah has kept the Lady Pioneer's offense balanced.

Coach Anderson and her father have both expressed to Hannah they are not opposed to her

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playing more aggressively on offense.

"I like playing defense better," Hannah said. "Getting the ball, that's how the offense starts. It's not really important to me how many points I score. Playing as a team is really important to me." Ben too has learned to value the bond on and off the court with his team.

"I've been playing with four or five of the guys since I was in like third grade," he said. "So just seeing them and

all this development in our last year of high school. Just all of us coming up, starting to play good as a team, together, after all that hard work and knowing each other for so long (is the highlight for me)."

Three seasons ago, Ben was one of the focal points on a talented junior varsity team. He has a keen eye for passing lanes and often runs the point like his sister, but isn't shy about getting his shots. He handled the ball in many late game situations and was eventually called up to varsity for the state playoffs, an experience that proved challenging but beneficial when he became a full-time varsity player his junior year.

"We were pretty young (junior year)," Ben said. "We only had three or four seniors, so our record wasn't that good. I wasn't playing particularly well, wasn't really scoring the ball and our team wasn't very good. It was rough last year, losing a lot of games, but this year we're winning like we should be."

Ben has contributed about eight points, three rebounds, two assists and two steals a game to a team that's currently 10-8 overall (4-5 in conference play). Hannah is averaging a double-double, at 11 points and 10 rebounds a game to go along with four assists, three blocks and three steals. The girl, mired in a five-game losing streak, are currently 7-12 (2-7 in conference play).

While victories on the court haven't quite outnumbered the defeats, Hannah's senior season has provides other opportunities.

"When you become a senior I think you come out of your shell a little bit," Coach Klay Anderson said. "You're like the top dog. She's really come out of her shell and this year she's like the practical joker on the team, always looking for something to jab at us coaches or any of us. When we play games in practice for competition she's always looking to get her team an edge. Those are the good times in practice and its nice to have seniors that realize its coming to an end. I think they relish and cherish everything they've got going on right now."

From her sophomore to senior year, Anderson says Hannah has handed the ups and downs with maturity and grace that can be chalked up to her parents. Owen and Pam Margolis have seen Hannah, Ben and their two older brothers walk the halls of Watauga. The two parents have preached three values to each of their children involved in high school sport: play hard, have fun and listen to the coaches.

"It's a sport," Owen said. "It should be fun for everybody and should be a good learning experience. It's not a gateway to NBA or WNBA contracts."

Fun and games aside, the two have always had a friendly-competitive streak, Ben claims he never fell to the two-time all-conference performer. What he does recall, is when "we'd lower the goal down so I could dunk on her."

"I can't tell you their exact record, but nobody went undefeated," Owen Margolis said. "There's healthy competition, but the competition has always been on a friendly level. They push each other competitively but they've always got along. They've always had a real close relationship with each other, they've always been supportive of each other. But they still maintain their own independence, they're not exactly alike."

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Having a twin sibling, along with two older brothers, certainly aided in their development as basketball players, but Hannah and Ben both maintained individual effort to improve.

“There’s a lot of other factors that I attribute to their hard work and desire to get better,” Owen added.

Whether advising one another on how to better follow-through on their lay-ups or ponder successes and failures post-game, the two have looked to one another while navigating each season.

“It’s like a teammate, but different, because you don’t have to worry about insulting each other,” Hannah said.

Hannah and Ben’s final home game at Watauga is scheduled for Feb. 12 against Hibriten on Senior Night.

“It just kind of hit me,” Ben said. It’s going to be weird come wintertime next year, there’s going to be nothing for the first time since I was in like third grade.”

Hannah, Ben and their parents will have plenty on their plates come next year. Both twins plan on attending college, and their parents expect to be visiting them. After putting kids through WHS for over eight years now, Owen and Pam hope to continue keeping up with the Pioneer’s up-and-coming players. For Coaches Anderson and Sanders, a new season will be coming to a close, and they will be saying good-bye to another set of seniors.

“One of the things we tell our guys at the beginning of the season is, in the blink of an eye you’re gonna be sitting in here and it’s gonna be senior night,” Coach Anderson said. “In October and November the season seems long. Once you start playing games and weather starts affecting everything, you got three games a week, it goes by in a hurry and I’ve never yet had a dry eye at the end of a game on senior night. It’s when the reality of this is ending comes together and they always use the cliché, the journey is what makes it all worthwhile.”