



II photos by Alli Scheck

# GAME ON

Mykayla Cunningham hits notes and shots

II story by Chloe Highsmith



Daughter, sister, basketball player, singer, dancer, student. These are the many titles of junior Mykayla Cunningham.

"I started playing basketball when I was five," Cunningham said, "and I started singing in the Sunshine Band at my church when I was 10."

Cunningham has not put the ball down since. Not only is she on the varsity basketball team, but she also sings in Choraliers, Free Spirit and her church youth choir. Cunningham is the junior class vice president, and in the spring she plans to participate in track and field. Her events are the 4x100, 4x400, long jump and high jump.

It is not without great dedication that Cunningham is able to accomplish all that she does. Many of her teachers, including choir teacher Ryan Holmquist, can attest to her character and work ethic.

"I see someone who is very well rounded," Holmquist said. "She always has a great attitude, I have never seen her without a smile on her face. She works incredibly hard."

English teacher Melinda Jett, Cunningham's ELO teacher, has seen her grow as both a student and a person over the past three years.

"As a younger student, she was not always open to the help of others," Jett said. "Now, I see a confident young woman who also values the love and care of others. To use a basketball cliché, Mykayla learned that the more people in her court who love her and believe in her, the more she will accomplish."

Jett said that Cunningham exemplifies the Napoleon Hill quote, "Whatever your mind can conceive and believe, it can achieve."

"Mykayla thinks success," Jett said. "So many people let doubt and fear get in their way. Mykayla lives as if she is already a success."

Cunningham's zeal for sports has landed her offers to play college basketball.

"After high school I want to go play D1 or D2 basketball," said Cunningham, who preferred not to mention which schools have offered her. "I want to major in psychology or education."

Although juggling her many activities has become natural over time, basketball is still at the top of Cunningham's list.

"My favorite part of playing is being on the defensive side," Cunningham said. "It's much more intense."

Not only is basketball Cunningham's favorite

pastime, she is also very successful at it.

Head women's basketball coach Chris Fear has seen Cunningham flourish throughout her time on the team.

"When I first saw her play, I was very impressed with how fast she was, and how well she handled the basketball," Fear said. "She played with pure joy."

Now in her third year on the Central basketball team, Fear said he has seen her confidence grow the most.

"I am so happy and blessed that I have been able to coach Mykayla," Fear said. "She is a special player but an even better person."

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*Coach Chris Fear*

With many people in her corner, few have seen more of Cunningham's successes than her father Robert Cunningham.

"People noticed her on the playground and would ask if she could play for teams," he said.

Religion and family are two very important values to the Cunninghams. Her father says she relies on

encouragement from her grandmother and certain Bible verses when she is stressed.

Cunningham brings these values into her sport as well.

She was very affected by the loss of her grandfather, known as "Papa Dunn" to her and many members of the community. She always waves to him as a part of a pregame ritual.

"She went to a Blue Star All American basketball camp last year that she loved it," Mr. Cunningham said. "It helped her through the loss of her grandpa."

For the youngest Cunningham, being immersed in a variety of activities has also meant embracing many social groups.

"I never wished I could fit in one place," Cunningham said. "Being involved with many things definitely increased my social life and helped me find people that I could really trust."

Even so, Cunningham said she wishes she could be more involved. She said she would love to do a musical or be on the bowling team if she had the time.

Through all of her pursuits, Cunningham said she gives her all, never knowing when it could be the last time she plays or performs.

"Always keep pushing," Cunningham said. "At any time, you could hurt something, or your voice could just be gone. Anytime could be your last time doing the thing you love."



CUNNINGHAM'S *stats*

|| as of February 1

8.3

POINTS

5.4

REBOUNDS

5.0

ASSISTS

3.2

STEALS

PER GAME