

Skeet-Browning in the spotlight

Sharon's Skeet-Browning credits hard work for success on court and off

Sharon student takes lead on the court and onstage

HIGH SCHOOL BOYS BASKETBALL

By **GREG FENNELL**

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SHARON — As the saying goes, whatever doesn't kill you makes you stronger. So taking the lead in a school musical as a singing elephant did Olly-Skeet Browning all sorts of good.

The Sharon Academy senior has played a starring role on two Phoenix teams during his high school athletic career: soccer for four years, basketball the last two. It's in the latter he's enjoyed the most growth, going from sophomore sixth man to senior leader, all while working at a sport that didn't come naturally to him at first.

It's a little more unusual to find Skeet-Browning in front of a crowd to carry a *Seussical*- the-musical tune onstage instead of a team on a hardwood floor.

"I can barely sing the right notes," Skeet-Browning confessed on Tuesday night after a 16-point, 15-rebound performance in TSA's 62-48 win over Websterville Baptist. "At the end of the day, there's no Broadway scouts there; it's just to have fun. ... My freshman year I did do a one-act play, but I decided that's not for me."

Skeet-Browning is still working to figure out what will be for him down the road. In the meantime, he has a Sharon boys basketball team to captain.

He didn't have to be front and center

SKEE T-BROWNING B5



Sharon captain Olly Skeet-Browning passes out of the backcourt to a teammate waiting under the basket as Websterville Baptist's Elijah Schumacher, left; Aaron Wright, second from left; and Cody Dalton, right, react in Sharon on Tuesday. Sharon won, 62-48.

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— JAMES M. PATTERSON



Olly Skeet-Browning, left, and Tyler Chapin, right, contribute to a critique of their first half against Websterville on Tuesday.

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against the Warriors (3-5), whose lanky, long-armed frontcourt cramped Skeet-Browning's ability to work off the blocks in his preferred manner. With sophomore teammate Ty Chapin scoring a career-high 35 points against Websterville's packed-in 2-3 zone, Skeet-Browning was most valuable cleaning the boards and kick-starting Sharon's transition game, which ultimately flummoxed the visitors.

"Between his junior and senior years, he's spent a ton of time playing basketball," TSA coach Blake Fabrikant said. "He kind of had an epiphany last year in our quarterfinal loss to Proctor, when he scored 6 points or something like that. He was like, 'I don't want to feel that helplessness again on the basketball court. I want to continue and take over a game.'" Skeet-Browning has been something of a soccer savant through his four Sharon years.

Born in Spain to an English mother and American father, Skeet-Browning moved to Vermont at the age of 6 and has always known the familiarity of a ball at his feet. Despite playing for three different coaches his last three years, he racked up big numbers for the Phoenix — 77 goals and 112 points.

"Even though I don't really remember always kicking a soccer ball around, that's just the culture there in Spain," Skeet-Browning said. "I'm sure, whenever I was out on the playground or something like

Wolves. Between drills and game situations, Skeet-Browning saw his basketball skills take a big leap forward.

"Defense has always come naturally to me because, in my opinion, it's just hard work and playing smart; those are two things I can do," he said. "But when it came to offense, it was a more skill-based component to the game. That's where I lacked: I didn't have a right hand, my shot wasn't falling, so that's where I turned to my game."

Sharon (4-4) moved in fits and starts during Tuesday's first half. Chapin scored 19 points but had little support as the Phoenix and Warriors played to a 24-24 halftime deadlock.

A two-pronged third-quarter run put TSA in control. Down 28-24, Sharon first reeled off nine points in a span of 1:13 on a Skeet-Browning putback, Erik Younce's one basket on the night, a Skeet-Browning 3pointer and a Chapin transition move.

After a minute and a half of ragged, up-and-down play, TSA found its range again to finish off an 18-7 gallop to close the third period. Chapin and Skeet-Browning both hit two more field goals — including another OSB three-ball — for a 42-35 advantage heading into the fourth period. Websterville got no closer.

"In some ways, even though he's a more natural soccer player, I think he enjoys basketball more," Fabrikant said. "I've seen his assets from fall to winter. One of the

colleges; Skeet-Browning said the figure is closer to 10. Whatever the ultimate choice, he doesn't expect interscholastic sports to follow.

The skills that made him a very good soccer player, an improving basketball player and a willing singer will.

"I think I like to put an emphasis on just working hard and taking nothing for granted, always working for whatever I got," he said. "I like to take opportunities when I have them. It's not worth it to let up opportunities just because you're nervous about it. I like to branch out when I can."

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Notes: Chapin's previous career best also came against the Warriors, a 31-point effort in a 73-59 win on Dec. 28 in Barre, Vt. ... Senior Sophia DiGuissepe, Skeet-Browning's *Seussical* co-lead, delivered a buttery *Star-Spangled Banner* before the game. "I had to sing harmonies with her; that helps, too," Skeet-Browning said. ... Sophomore Riley Eastman accounted for the Phoenix's remaining nine points. ... Sharon hosts Proctor in a rematch of last year's quarterfinal on Thursday night.

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that, I was always kicking a ball around. So when I came back to the States and thinking about sports ... soccer always just came more naturally to me.”

Basketball has required more work, and it may end up being Skeet-Browning’s more satisfying achievement.

Skeet-Browning played sixth man — sort of a defense-first “energy guy,” Fabrikant said — as a sophomore in TSA’s undefeated VPA Division IV state championship campaign two years ago. He went from averaging 4.5 points per game as a sophomore to 9.5 last year; he’s doubled it again this winter, carrying a 20.1 ppg average into Tuesday’s game, third-best in the Upper Valley.

Skeet-Browning’s roundball education gained a boost last spring with an AAU season with the Kelsey Jacobs-coached Randolph

funny things about him is, where people might not think they’re good at something, he wants to put more work in and see results.”

November’s two-week musical production — an all-school Sharon Academy tradition — filled Skeet-Browning with a relative level of dread. He ultimately took to the role of Horton in the same manner he’s approached basketball: learning, improving, enjoying the process.

“I like sports and all that, but that musical is kind of daunting,” Skeet-Browning said. “I like dancing in the background where no one can see me, and then all of a sudden I’m on stage singing my heart out. ... Overall, I’m glad I did it. It’s a great opportunity.”

Skeet-Browning isn’t sure of what the future holds. Fabrikant, who is also the senior’s school adviser, estimate he’s applied to nearly three dozen



As Sharon Academy picks up steam against Websterville, Tyler Chapin, left, celebrates while heading to the sidelines for a timeout with Phoenix teammate Ian Robertson, right, in Sharon on Tuesday. Sharon won 62-48.

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