

## ATHLETICS BUILDS STRONG LEADERS

*JoAnn Reeve—Department of Physical Education*

As long as I can remember, I have loved the beauty of athletics and that of outstanding performances in sports. To me, the seemingly free-flowing yet powerful performances of physical skills by highly trained athletes are absolutely beautiful, and at times unforgettably breathtaking. I have been in attendance at athletic events where the performance was so excellent that the entire audience stood spontaneously and shouted in pure joy at the execution of the skills of the game and of the competition. I have been one of the people in the audience shouting and clapping and absolutely thrilled at the performance that I had just witnessed. There are very few things in this life that so affect individuals and bring out such feelings of joy as do phenomenal feats in sports. You feel the same absolute thrill for this athletic level of excellence whether you are playing in the event or simply watching it—everyone present is truly a participant in the excellence. I love this type of support and involvement, and know that it does much to unite communities, student-bodies, and team members to the highest levels of unity and involvement.

In the more than thirty years that I have been here, I have truly learned to love the dedicated, hard-working, well-rounded athletes who have participated in our athletic sports teams here at Ricks College. Although it is not always easy to be out performing in front of so many night after night and year after year, our remarkable young people have not seemed to shrink from such challenges, because they had prepared for such levels of greatness all of their lives. For the most part, they have been extremely strong examples to those who admire them and with whom they have associated. They have been fun, outgoing young people who enjoyed being with friends and working hard to accomplish goals, and who thoroughly enjoyed life and having a good time—their enthusiasm for living has been highly contagious on our campus and in our community as well. These young people had learned from a very young age how to excel in all aspects of their lives, including socially, spiritually, academically and athletically.

This past season, for instance, my volleyball team had an overall grade point average of 3.61, the highest volleyball team GPA in the nation. They were honored as the NJCAA First Team Academic All-America Team, as were several other athletic teams at Ricks College. This achievement clearly shows that these dedicated young people work hard to obtain their academic education as well as to excel in athletics. This type of commitment rubs off on a campus, and many see and feel their examples and get further involved themselves in activities at higher levels of excellence because of the leadership examples exhibited by our athletes.

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These remarkable young people are the reason our Ricks College Athletic programs have been so outstanding. They value their friends and the people they associate with, they work to stay strong and fit, they strive diligently for their educations, they love the Gospel, and many of them have since served missions for the Church. Many are now married in the temple to worthy mates, and are raising strong families. Many so enjoyed their experiences at Ricks College that they long for their children to come and play here as well, so they can have similar life-changing experiences. They have truly brought an exciting, captivating, powerful example to this campus over the years, which has contributed significantly to the great Spirit of Ricks that we have come to feel around us on the campus so abundantly, and to cherish so dearly.

I share with you some of the feelings, in their own words, of a few of our former athletes and even some of their parents, about their love of the excellence, the loyalty, the spiritual camaraderie, and the personal growth that came into their lives while attending and participating in athletics at Ricks College.

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As you can learn from their testimonials, the lives of these athletes were changed and shaped for good through participation in athletics, and this change has rippled into the lives of their families and those whom they associate with forever. I believe there have been between five and six hundred athletes who have participated on our teams while I have had the opportunity of coaching here. In preparing this article, I have been touched to realize the influence for eternal good that the Ricks College athletic program has had in the lives of these wonderful athletes, and there are hundreds more stories that could have been included. Life-changing accounts such as these only more fully verify the value of our excellent athletic program and its priceless successes. I too am a finer individual for my association in this coaching capacity; for these life-altering opportunities I have experienced with the athletes, I am eternally grateful. And, finally, from the bottom of my heart, I thank you, beloved athletes and friends, for my “perfect life.” You can be certain that there will be a coach living somewhere who will always cherish and remember you—her Vikings!



MARI BURNINGHAM CARPENTER, '96-'98  
*NJCAA First Team All-America / 2000 Alumni Athlete of the Year*

Ricks College Athletics was a conduit to provide not only great athletes a chance to compete against other great athletes, but it was a chance to be well-rounded because of the Ricks College atmosphere.

Excellence was stressed in every area of our lives. Not only were we pressed and pushed to succeed on the volleyball court, but in all avenues

of our lives as well. If we could be great athletes, then why not great scholar athletes, great people providing service to others, and standing as a witness to those things that all people should have.

The people I played with changed my life for the better. I was spending my youth doing things that were not good to my body or my spirit, and because of the excellence I was surrounded with I saw what I could be, and I changed. I owe my life to Ricks College, the athletic department and my team. If it had not been for them I would not have found my husband and gotten sealed for time and all eternity in the Salt Lake Temple just like my parents and grandparents.

My Ricks College days have long since passed, and I still remember fondly my time there. Most of my memories are related to volleyball, the people I met through volleyball, and the doors that have been opened because I played volleyball at Ricks College. I often get asked how I liked my time there. I usually reply, “How long do you have?” Ricks College was nothing short of magical and nothing short of a miracle for me, and it would *never* have happened if there had not been a volleyball program to entice me to go there in the first place.

Athletics is such a little thing in the grand scope of things, but the things that come from it last a lifetime. Not only do we get to play a game and hone talents given us by our Father in Heaven, but we learn how to work as a team, we build confidence in ourselves and those around us, we get to travel the country and be great role models, share the gospel, build friendships for life, and learn to succeed in all avenues of our lives. Ricks College, and especially Ricks College volleyball was the pivotal point in my life as in the lives of so many others I have spoken to. Hurrah for Ricks College athletics!



BARBARA GREEN YECK, '79-'81

*NJCAA First Team All-America / Ricks College Hall of Fame*

**A**ctively participating in the athletics program at Ricks College remains one of the greatest and most memorable experiences of my life. Nothing can adequately describe the excitement of being caught up in the momentum of a fast paced game. It is so thrilling to hear the crowd's cheers of enthusiasm. In my opinion the greatest thing about my involvement in the sports program at Ricks College was the strong and uplifting environment that encircles the school. Other teams in the area really respect the high standards that the college continues to uphold. I made many lasting memories playing alongside my fellow athletes. The employees, coaches, and faculty were always a source of inspiration and comfort to me.

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I experienced a lot of personal growth while attending Ricks College. Athletics taught me the importance of discipline, dedication, and cooperation. I was constantly influenced by the high caliber of my teammates. Hard work and integrity are some examples of the values I learned during my athletic career, and these character attributes have helped me throughout my life. I am grateful for all the wonderful lessons and good times I experienced at Ricks College, whether it was on or off the court. Finding my eternal companion and marrying him in the temple for time and all eternity was also a deep blessing of coming to Ricks College to participate in the athletic program. It is of no wonder why our oldest daughter is now attending Ricks College, and enjoying it, as her parents did before her.



LINN PEARSON BELNAP, '79-'81  
*NJCAA First Team All-America, Ricks College Hall of Fame*

**I** look back on my involvement in girl's athletics with fond memories, and gratitude for the lessons learned.

The coaches I worked with taught me a great deal more than how to play the sport. Their priority was developing the character of the athlete. I learned what a blessing work is. I was taught the meaning of integrity, honesty, teamwork, and unity.

The lessons I have learned through sports have carried over into every aspect of my life. I learned what it meant not to give up, to endure when things seemed bleak, when I was tired, and when I didn't think there was anything left in me to push on with. That lesson alone has helped me in life as my husband and I have been raising our four children. We have faced some real obstacles together as we have moved our family from Egypt, to Morocco, and to Jerusalem.

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I am grateful for the opportunities I had to participate in athletics. I am especially grateful that I was able to play in an environment where the gospel was an integral part of our daily activities. We grew close together as a team, and we were strengthened as we shared the gospel one with another.

I have three daughters who all enjoy athletics. My oldest is a junior in high school, and is looking forward to playing sports as she moves on to college. My hope is that she can enjoy the same gospel-oriented experience that I was so fortunate to have.



JOYCE ANDERSON, '78-'80  
*Point Guard, Ricks College Basketball Team*  
*Setter, Ricks College Volleyball Team*

The summer after I graduated from high school I was really torn about where to go to college and play sports. I knew I would earn a college degree, but my thoughts at that point were totally preoccupied with attending a college in which I could play sports. Playing sports was my first priority, but at the same time I wanted to be around people who would have great standards and help influence me for good. I knew this would be a big turning point in my life, and I wanted to make the right decision.

I struggled with the decision until the last possible day. Finally, I got smart and got down on my knees and pled with the Lord to help me know where to go to school. Several hours later, in the wee hours of the morning, the phone rang. I knew it was my answer! It was my friend, Denise. She had a feeling about where she had signed to go to college, and miraculously had called to see if I would go to Ricks College with her. This was an answer to prayer straight and strong from my dear Lord to me.

Even though this answer came to me nearly twenty-five years ago, it is one of the strongest answers to prayer that I have ever received. I am sure it came powerfully, because it was a defining moment in my life. I gained a testimony of the gospel while at Ricks College. It was an incredible place with exceptional people who influenced me. I learned skills while playing sports at Ricks College that have helped me to live a better life. I learned leadership, teamwork, sacrifice, and how to get along with others. These skills have helped me immensely to be able to serve a mission for the Church to Japan, to serve in Relief Society Presidencies, to serve as a Young Women's President, to graduate from college with a Bachelor of Science degree and a Masters degree, to teach school for thirteen years, and to coach sports for ten of those years as well.

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My life has been greatly blessed for the choice I made to go to Ricks College, and I am sure my teammates would strongly agree. As I have watched some of my dearest friends from back then marry in the temple, raise their children, hold Church leadership positions, send their children on missions, and see their children marry in the temple, I am sure they have gleaned some of the same skills that I learned through playing sports at Ricks College.

Now with these things said, I hope that it is clear why the announcement for no more intercollegiate sports at Ricks College was disheartening to me. As you can tell, I loved playing sports, and I miss playing them immensely. I am sad for all the girls who enjoy playing sports as I do, who won't have the opportunities that I had as a young woman at Ricks College. I feel

sorry for the daughters of my teammates who won't be able to play there. I feel bad about not being able to ever see a game played by the Ricks College teams again. I am not trying to sound negative, because I do sustain any decision that Church leaders make through prayer and under the Lord's direction. It's been hard for me to understand why something that was so good for me then could be so bad for them now. I wish I could hear the story, the prayer, or the thoughts that led to eliminating sports from Ricks College, so that I could more clearly understand why the decision was made.



ROBERT & GIGI SONJU  
*Parents of Robyn Sonju Felder, '98-'00*

**A**s parents of Robyn Sonju Felder, we felt a need to express our feelings on our daughter's experience while at Ricks College. Initially, we were disappointed at our daughter's choice to attend a two-year college, rather than a four-year university.

What wisdom our daughter had. One trip to the Ricks College campus, seeing its beauty, feeling the friendly atmosphere that exists there, and finally a coach who loved the girls beyond their athletic ability. Robyn could see on her visit how positive the Ricks College experience would be as she observed the girls on the volleyball team at that time. Coach Reeve prepared the girls for life, developing testimonies, setting goals, working hard at whatever they did, and holding firm to their beliefs and conduct. How proud we were as parents, to see the team always exhibit "classy" behavior, whether winning or losing. This comes from a combination of a great coach and the many lessons and experiences learned from a high class athletic program.

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In our daughter's years of competition in volleyball, her experiences at Ricks College with Coach Reeve cannot be matched. We sincerely hope that someday the athletic program will be restored at BYU-Idaho. It was such an incredible example to other schools' athletic programs. Many thanks to the Ricks College Staff, and especially to Coach JoAnn Reeve, for the experience our daughter had at Ricks College and for what she has achieved and become in life.



ROBYN SONJU FELDER, '98-'00  
*NJCAA First Team All-America*

Deciding to go to Ricks College was the most influential decision I have made in my entire life. Not only did I gain a testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ, but I figured out who I was and why I was placed on this earth. While I loved dating, my Ricks College experience was magnified once I met my husband. We loved and supported each other through athletics and schooling, and had the opportunity to get married in the St. George Temple. I value no other accomplishment as much as my temple marriage.

The athletic program at Ricks College trained me for excellence not only in volleyball but in all aspects of my life as well. Despite my athletic ability, I knew that hard work and effort would be the key to becoming my best. In the off-season I trained harder than I ever had before. Every day after practice, I was in the weight room getting extra repetitions. My summer vacations were spent running, lifting, and conditioning. I was a woman on a mission: I wanted to be the best.

I am proud to say that my efforts paid off. My sophomore year at Ricks College, I had my best season ever and was recruited to play at a Division I program on a full ride scholarship. I truly believe that the coaches at Ricks College were the reason why I was as successful as I was. Their philosophy on volleyball, life, and family not only made me a better volleyball player but a better person as well. I will never forget all the team room talks, long days in the gym, training room memories, and bus trips. Ricks College helped me become the person that I am now; it truly was the best time of my life. ∞

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