

Stricker excels in several sports

Senior athlete from Oak Grove stars in track, cross country, soccer, powerlifting

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To look at Kayla Stricker in the hallways at Oak Grove High School, one would never suspect that she is an athlete, let alone an elite athlete.

She stands about 5-foot-2 and weighs in at a robust 116 pounds, and has a quiet personality.

But put Stricker in running gear, or any sort of athletic garb, and she reveals a strong, well-conditioned body, and her quiet manner masks a fierce will to succeed.

"She can do any sport she wanted to do and do it well," said Oak Grove track and cross country coach Robin Ryder. "She can take her pick of what she wanted to be the best in."

Oak Grove soccer coach Clay Smith puts it bluntly.

"She's the best athlete I've ever seen in all the years I've been here," Smith said.

Whether it's distance running, lifting weights or playing soccer, Stricker has done it, and done it well.

For that reason, Stricker has been selected as the Hattiesburg American Girls Athlete of the Year for the 2011-12 school year.

For Stricker, everything goes back to running.

"I started running at the age of 6," Stricker said. "My dad really started to push me when I got into seventh grade. Later, I started trying different sports to see which

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one I liked."

Stricker's first taste of real success came when she was in eighth grade at Poplarville, when she won the 1,600-meter race at the Class 4A track meet.

After her family moved to Oak Grove when she was a sophomore, she finished first in the Class 6A girls cross country race.

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— Kayla Stricker,
Hattiesburg American
Female Athlete
of the Year

Later, she tried soccer, and started for the Lady Warriors her junior and senior seasons, and also took up powerlifting.

She succeeded at both of those pursuits.

"I've got a competitive spirit that I've gotten from my dad," Stricker said. "I don't like losing to anybody, even my family."

In cross country, Stricker followed up her first-place finish as a sophomore with back-to-back third-place finishes in the 6A race.

In powerlifting, Stricker was third as a junior in the 123-pound class at the

MHSAA State Meet, with a total of 630 pounds, but she stepped it up this season, winning the 123-pound class with a total of 670 pounds.

"I started lifting with my brother, who was on the team," Stricker said. "I used to lift with my dad at home, and I really started to love it. It's something different from running all the time."

In soccer, Stricker scored eight goals and had one assist for the Lady Warriors this season.

"She was a good player for us," Smith said. "With her distance-running background, she had a lot of stamina."

Soccer was actually one of the first sports she played as a child.

"Soccer was an alternative as an extra sport," Stricker said. "I was just trying things. I started playing at an early age, then finished it the past couple of years."

Stricker's natural athletic ability is such that she runs distance for the Oak Grove track team and participates in the pole vault.

"We were out tailgating at USM one time, and some kids were playing football off to the side," Ryder said. "She got out there, and she could throw it farther than any of them."

"Honestly, I think she could have gotten a scholarship in soccer if she'd wanted to."

Instead, Stricker will stay close to home and run cross country and track at William Carey University.

"I just wanted to stay close to home," Stricker said. "But I haven't really thought about what I want to be when I finish school. I'm just enjoying being 17 and having fun."



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KAYLA STRICKER has been one of the top runners in the state for several years.