

Clayton Sports

Basketball is in the genes for Gina Del Bene

RANDY ROWLAND
Clayton Pioneer

Gina Del Bene comes from a basketball loving family with a long tradition of playing hoops.

Her uncles, Joe and Jim Del Bene, and her father, John Del Bene, all played basketball and all had very successful careers at Ygnacio Valley High School. Her cousins Dan, John, Natalia, and Keaton all starred at Clayton Valley High School. So it is no wonder that Gina followed in their footsteps and developed a love for the sport at a very young age.

In fact, before Gina was even born, John had already installed a permanent basket in the backyard of their family home. As a toddler, Gina began learning to bounce the basketball and trying to put it in the basket.

Gina began organized basketball in second grade at Mount Diablo Elementary. She signed up to play CYO through St. Bonaventure, and continued to play for her parish through the end of eighth grade, when she graduated from Diablo View Middle School. There, her classmates named her "Most Athletic."

During her seven years of playing with St. Bonaventure, she was coached by her dad, John, who quickly understood



Photo courtesy of John Del Bene.
GINA DEL BENE, freshman on Clayton Valley Eagles Varsity basketball team, began her career in the second grade.

that she was ready to take on the challenge of playing for a club team. As she continued to dominate the competition, she natu-

rally progressed to the next level and tried out with AAU, and made the team.

Following her sixth-grade

season at St. Bonaventure, she began playing with her year-round team, the Orinda Magic.

The Magic consists of 11 girls, including two from Clayton — Del Bene and Sarah Nelson. The Magic play a year-long schedule and travel to tournaments within the Bay Area and as far away as Nevada and Oregon.

"I immediately grew really attached to Gina because she was just so determined, and such an incredibly hard worker," said Magic coach Darrell Hirashima Jr. "She is a very genuine person who has no ulterior motive. She just works hard and wants to improve to help her team. She has a never give up attitude, and is so coachable. I think she will be a very good high school player, and am looking forward to having her back next year."

Likewise, Gina has been very impressed by her coach. "He is an awesome coach, he has taught me a lot, and has been great at teaching fundamentals," she said.

This year Gina is a freshman at Clayton Valley High School. After tryouts were completed the first week of November, first-year coach Bernard Barnes notified her that she had made the Varsity team. She was one of two freshmen to make the Varsity squad, along with her club teammate Sarah Nelson.

"It was really exciting to be pulled aside and told I was going to be on Varsity," Gina said.

The Clayton girls practice Monday through Friday for two hours, and Gina said she has really enjoyed her time with the team so far.

"The other girls have really taken me in and have been really great," she said. "This is a great group to play with."

The Eagles faced some adversity in the non-league pre-season schedule, but have been improving each time out. They have wins against Terra Linda and a very good Foothill team from Pleasanton. On Jan. 7, the Eagles began a very difficult league schedule, including two games each against league powerhouses Carondelet and Deer Valley.

"My goal for the team is to go to the playoffs," Gina said. "That would be tremendous accomplishment. It is going to be tough, but we are getting better and better as a team."

Gina can play anywhere on the basketball court, and is a versatile all-around contributor to both of her teams. She usually plays the guard or small forward positions, but has stepped in anywhere there is a need. She likes the physical nature of the sport and is not afraid to defend bigger players.

Gina considers her defense to be the strength of her game, but she is learning to be more involved in the offense. In a recent game against Amador Valley, she made three of four free throws in the last 30 seconds of the game.

Gina is dedicated to improving her game and has attended basketball camps twice a year since second grade. She has also participated in the Knights of Columbus free throw shooting competitions, and last year qualified for the State Finals in Fresno, where she finished third. In the regional finals, Gina converted 20 of 25 attempts for an 80 percent mark.

Gina says she thinks she would someday like to play at the college level, but she is not even thinking about that right now, as her focus is on her development, and helping her teams. She says her biggest influences in basketball are her dad, "who taught me how to play, and my cousin Natalia." She hopes to emulate their success in the sport and continue the tradition of Del Bene basketball in the Concord and Clayton area.

Her sister Anne Marie, a sixth-grader at Diablo View Middle School, is waiting in the wings to take her turn next. She is currently tearing it up for her own St. Bonaventure team.

After slow start, DVSC Demolition finishes third in league

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The Diablo Valley Soccer Club Demolition U14 boys class III team played in the finals of the Newark Soccer Club Winterfest tournament on Dec. 8-9.

This tournament was the team's second finals appearance this season, and comes after a very good league season in District 4 gold division, where the Demolition boys finished in third place with 15 points.

After beginning the league season 0-3, the team had an

impressive run of competitive games, and won five games down the stretch against very good teams from Richmond and Oakland. Demolition is made up of 15 boys, most of whom attend Diablo View Middle School.

"At the beginning of the season we were a little bit shell shocked," said Coach Rick White, who also coaches the junior varsity boys' soccer team at Clayton Valley High School. "There was a big difference in the speed of play in the gold flight, and the boys had trouble adjusting. But after around the

fourth game they clicked, they learned to play as a team, and have really stepped it up since that time."

On the first day of play, the Demolition faced local rivals East Diablo Rebels from Brentwood and got by them 1-0, with Zach Shaw scoring the only goal of the contest after a pass from Ryan Jeans. The second game of the day saw the Demolition take on the Manteca Rangers, whom they also beat 1-0, this time with Jeans scoring on an assist from Zach Jacobson. After the first day of the tournament, the boys were 2-0 and had two shutouts.

Going into the Sunday morning game against Petaluma, the boys dominated play and coasted to an easy 3-0 victory. Goals in this game came from Sammy Marchant, Jacobson and Jeans, with his second goal of the tournament, and off of a header. This third shutout win in a row qualified the Demolition for the finals, where they met the undefeated Sunnyvale club, which had also

experienced only shutout victories in the tournament.

Unfortunately, the Demolition's fantastic run ended

against a very skilled Sunnyvale team that had no weaknesses, leaving the Demolition holding the second place trophy.

"This tournament summed up our season, we came out and

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Photo courtesy of Steve Jacobson
THE DVSC DEMOLITION U14 CLASS III BOYS TEAM after receiving their Runner Up Trophy at the Newark Soccer Club Winterfest tournament. Back Row: Coach Rick White, Sammy Marchant (Mid), Coach Dan Shaw. Middle Row: Matt Jacobson (G/Fwd) Cole White (FB), Ryan Long (FB), Ben Coffey (Fwd), Anthony Nahal (Mid), Zach Pauline (FB), Chris Lee (G), Joe O'Leary, Coach Dan Pauline. Front Row: Casey Hood, Ryan Jeans, Cameron Bacigalupo, Zach Shaw, Zach Jacobson, Ryan Nelson.

Sports Shorts

Clayton Valley High School Athletic Boosters Club will be hosting its 14th annual Crab Feed & Auction on Saturday, Jan. 12th at 6pm at the Centre Concord. This is a major fundraiser which directly bene-

fits all athletic programs at CVHS. Seating is limited. Tickets are on sale now for \$50 each at the school or online at www.cvhsboosters.org. Donations or questions are accepted by emailing crabfeed@cvhsboosters.org.

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