



Skyleigh Thompson
Junior Forward - University of Montana (Division I)
4x All State - 2019 Montana Player of the Year
2023 Big Sky Conference Offensive MVP
2023 1st Team All-Big Sky
2023 1st Team All-West Region (First in school history)
2023 United Soccer Coaches Scholar All-American

“Set goals for yourself and enjoy the process. Embrace the challenges and the grind and attack everyday with positivity because that ultimately is what makes you a better person and player. Everyday is an opportunity to become a better version of yourself on and off the field. Stay disciplined and focus on the things in your control. Have gratitude for everyone who is supporting you along the way. Most importantly enjoy where you are and have fun! As always, GO GRIZ!” **Skyleigh Thompson**

We need to take a moment to recognize an incredible achievement by one of our former players, Skyleigh Thompson. We met and started working with Skyleigh in 8th grade. She had played center back her entire life. When you see her play, there are a few qualities that you can't miss: incredible speed, physicality, unmatched work rate, and a drive and desire that never relents. We moved her to an attacking role and believed that if she put in the time and work, that one day she could truly be an elite center forward / winger.

Fast forward 7 years to today, and this Kalispell native played an instrumental role in helping the University of Montana women's soccer team have a record-setting season. Skyleigh was voted Offensive MVP for the entire Big Sky Conference, 1st Team All Big Sky, 1st Team All-West Region, and Scholar All-American.

There are lots of players with talent. However, competing and having success to this degree and at the Division I level takes much more than talent. It takes a work-rate, desire, mindset, and positive attitude that can't be stopped. This separates the good players from the great. Hindsight is 20-20 and we wanted to take a moment to reflect and share a bit of Skyleigh's journey and the key standout attributes that helped propel her along the way.

Mentality

Skyleigh was extremely positive, put the team first, and led by example with her workrate. She never got down on herself or her teammates when a mistake was made. She was a player that was absolutely relentless and simply would not stop working, competing, and trying to win. If she was having an “off” game or made a mistake, she would simply carry on and continue to work to do better. She was extremely coachable and would immediately try what the coaches would ask. She constantly sought out feedback for areas to improve.

Training

Skyleigh was the first one at practice and the last to leave. She spent countless hours after practice shooting, dribbling, juggling, etc. She was never one to complain or make excuses. She spent incredible amounts of time with the ball working to improve. When she wasn't at the field, she was in the weight room working to improve her strength, speed, and physical attributes as well as reduce the chance of injuries.

Parent Support

We'd be failing to tell the entire story if we didn't include her incredible parents. They were everything you dream for when coaching: supportive, positive, and trusting the coaches and process. They left the **right areas** of Skyleigh's development and path in her hands. They trusted and supported the coaches. They were always positive, and took a "long-term view" of Skyleigh's development. This environment didn't apply the unnecessary pressure seen all too often in youth sports today. It also allowed Skyleigh the freedom to play through success and failure and ultimately thrive.

Key Takeaways

- **Anything is possible and don't be afraid of aiming for excellence.** All players should DREAM BIG and then work hard to achieve their goals. 7 years ago Skyleigh was just another 8th grader from Kalispell, MT and now, due to her hard work and dedication, her abilities are being recognized on a national level. Our club is still very young and has already had teams and players compete with some of the top teams and players in our region, across the country, and even internationally. Our first signing class is this spring and we're excited to see all of the future players that come up through our club and what they accomplish in the game!
- Real, tangible, and substantial player development & improvement happens in **deliberate training**, not in games. I want to be clear here, all players want to play the game (and parents want to watch the game) because it is obviously the most fun and that is 1000% normal and ok. However, in order for your player to have the most fun and be as successful as possible in the game, they need to put in the time and be their best in training (team training, small group private training, and time on their own) and then apply what they've learned to the game.
- **"There are more silver and bronze medal players that make it through than gold medal players"** This is a great quote from one of my colleagues and mentors Gary Lewis. Chasing medals and wins should not be the focus. Players should learn to love the game, love to compete, and love to work hard and improve. Adversity and playing the game for the right reasons will bring out the best in your player and take them the furthest. Skyleigh had injuries and multiple setbacks all throughout her career. However, she loved the game and she made the decision to persevere, put in the work, and was constantly trying to improve. **Ultimately, what a player accomplishes in the game is up to them!**
- **Control the Controllables.** Skyleigh worked extremely hard and was very disciplined. She made excellent grades. She gave back her time in community service. She ate well, slept well, and trained well. She spent large amounts of time with the ball on her own. She was in the weight room improving her physical performance. She sacrificed time to not only train, but also put in the time for school work maintaining a 4.00 throughout high school and college. She took control of the time she had and made sure that her actions reflected her goals. The largest portion of a player's development is determined by the work they put in! Spend time on your own working to improve, especially in your weak areas. Be coachable. Get comfortable being uncomfortable and seek out feedback on ways to improve.
- **Trust the process.** Skyleigh - and her parents - never questioned what team she was on, who the coach was, what position the coach played her in and never badgered the coaches or directors. If there was a game, Skyleigh was playing. It didn't matter if it was with the boys, with her friends, or with people she didn't know, she was going to play. She worked her hardest in training and games and put in the time away from practice. Her parents supported her by giving her everything she needed to be at practices and games, and left the rest up to her. **Parents:** take a deep breath. Be positive and grateful that your player is healthy and pursuing something they love. **Have peace of mind knowing that this is their journey and it's up to them.** Enjoy these moments and memories with your child.

Reflection questions and topics for players and parents:

- 1) What are your players goals in the game? **Do their actions reflect their goals?**
- 2) Is your player more focused on games or improving in their own time? How much time does your player spend in the offseason working to improve their weak areas?
- 3) How do you and your player handle adversity? How do you respond when the team loses a game or when your player has a bad game? Do you spend time criticizing the ref, the other team, your own team, your coach?