

Big athlete's act reveals a big heart

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

It only took a couple of seconds, but Rick Riggi's goodwill gesture near the end of a basketball game last winter has spawned a long-lasting, feel-good effect.

The scene was Pavilion High School Feb. 18, where Rick's Caledonia-Mumford High varsity team was playing a late-season contest. With Cal-Mum comfortably ahead, Pavilion inserted Teddy Schwytzer, a fourth-year student manager with Down syndrome who had never gotten into a game.

As the final buzzer approached, Teddy's teammates handed him the ball to give him a chance at scoring, but he could not convert. Finally, with only a few seconds left, Rick — who was playing center for Cal-Mum — got a rebound. Rather than look for an open teammate, he quickly handed the ball back to an opponent — on purpose. That person was Teddy.

"It was just something that clicked in my head. I saw him out of the corner of my eye," recalled Rick, 17.

Teddy proceeded to make a short jump shot and, as Rick remembers, the Pavilion gymnasium erupted. "Yeah, it was hard to hear," he said.

Cal-Mum won 75-47. After the game, Rick said, "People were saying 'nice assist' and 'that was the best turnover I've ever seen.'"

Next thing Rick knew, "The Play" was the subject of a feature in the Rochester *Democrat and Chronicle* newspaper. Then the television stations began to call. Teddy was also featured in a book, *Buffalo Soul Lifters*, a collection of inspirational stories that's available through buffalobooks.com. Rick noted that Teddy has mailed him personally autographed copies of articles that were written about "The Play."



Mike Crupi/Catholic Courier

Caledonia-Mumford High School senior Rick Riggi made headlines last winter when, during a basketball game against Pavilion High School, he helped an opposing player with Down syndrome score the only basket of his career. A parishioner of St. Columba/St. Patrick in Caledonia, Riggi recently received a Hands of Christ award.

Even this fall, Rick was still meeting admirers for the first time. A parishioner of St. Columba/St. Patrick in Caledonia, Livingston County, Rick received a diocesan Hands of Christ Award for outstanding service by high-school seniors. While attending the award gathering held Oct. 19 at Greece's Our Mother of Sorrows Church, Rick was approached by Michael Theisen, diocesan director of youth

Sports

ministry. Theisen introduced himself and said that after reading about Rick and Teddy last winter, he has made "The Play" a part of numerous presentations both locally and around the country.

"Yeah, that really surprised me," Rick said of his meeting with Theisen. "I did not expect all this publicity. I was thinking a little hug from my mom and dad, and that would be it."

Rick said he can appreciate the challenges Teddy faces because he has a relative with a disability. "I just think about how hard it's got to be sometimes," he said.

This sensitivity reveals a soft spot that Rick doesn't normally show during competition. "After a game I shake hands, but during the game it's as if I'm their worst enemy," he stated.

Which is pretty scary when you consider that Rick measures in at 6-foot-5 and 265 pounds. In fact, Rick was an altar server at St. Columba/St. Patrick from fourth grade un-

til early in high school — but had to stop because he had outgrown the largest available outfit.

A center and defensive tackle in football, Rick played all this fall on a bad knee and is giving it a rest by not playing basketball this winter. He will instead spend his free time hitting the weight room and visiting colleges. Rick, who has also remained active at St. Columba/St. Patrick through the parish's RE-NEW program, said it's important for him to stay involved in church life as he moves into adulthood.

Rick is a 91-average student and National Honor Society member. He would like to play football in college; among the schools he's exploring are Williams, Cornell, Dartmouth, Colgate, the University of Rochester and Hobart. He plans to study biology and would like to someday be a teacher. "I'd like to think I get along with younger children really good," he said.

No matter what his future accomplishments, Rick can forever cherish the memory of his moment with Teddy that has struck a chord with so many.

"It feels great," he said.

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