

Island Sports

Uttley selected to boys' soccer All-American team

By Adrienne Downing

For one month in the summer, North Kingstown High School junior Brett Uttley may be found relaxing on the beach in Jamestown. After that month is over, Uttley is back to business, perfecting his All-American soccer game.

Uttley was one of only 72 boys' high school soccer players named to the National Soccer Coaches Association of America All-American team in 2006. The award is even more prestigious considering that only 15 of those 72 players were underclassmen.

Not only was Uttley key to the Skippers undefeated regular season in the fall, but he also plays with the Olympic development

team, a premier soccer club, works with a strength coach, and volunteers with various youth sports programs, keeping him busy almost all year long.

It is not surprising that soccer plays such an important role for him because he does not remember a time in his life when he did not play soccer.

"I have been playing soccer almost since I started walking," Uttley explained. "I started early because my sister played, and I used to go out and kick the ball around the yard. I don't ever remember a time when I didn't have a ball at my feet."

His mom, Jean, concurs, adding, "Ball was his first word and



Brett Uttley shows off his outstanding foot skills as he gets the ball by a Bishop Hendricken defender.

he had the littlest cleats that I have ever seen."

Stories about his early career, but the one most memorable to his father, Fred, happened when he was 7-years-old.

"I took a soccer class with a URI coach, and he recommended some tapes for me to watch. My kids liked the tapes, so they would find them and watch them. I was watching them and trying to teach Brett, and I couldn't do one of the moves," his father explained. "He told me, 'Dad, this is how you do it,' and not an hour later, he was showing me how to do the move."

The story has an interesting twist to it because the coach that recommended those tapes to Fred Uttley was Michael Bradley, father of North Kingstown's last All-American, Mike Bradley.

"After that, buying tapes for him became a tradition. I will buy him a tape, and he will go off and watch it and then you will see him out in the yard practicing something on it for hours," Fred Uttley said.

Brett's practice ethic is not limited to tape watching, either. He has been known to stay after games and practice for hours. After one particular practice, he stayed for two hours working on a shot that he deemed less than perfect.

"We stayed out there and he took shot after shot until he was happy with it, and then he hit that shot in the next game against Bishop Hendricken, and it was amazing to watch," his dad explained.

That shot was one of 15 that went in the net for Uttley during the Skippers season, along with his 15 assists.

A rare combination of a humble attitude off the field and killer instincts on the field have earned him praise among his coaches and teammates alike.

He was recently selected as the Gatorade Rhode Island Boys' Soccer Player of the Year and earned possibly the highest honor that an athlete can gain, praise from a rival high school coach.

"Brett is just the greatest kid you would ever want to meet. He is humble. He works hard, and he is very talented," Uttley's own coach, Kyle Froberg, said.

With as many accolades as he has earned on the soccer field, it is surprising to learn that until very recently, soccer was not his only sport.

Baseball, basketball and golf were all sports that he had played at some point, but after he consulted those close to him, he decided that in order to take his soccer game to the next level he would concentrate solely on soccer, much

to his grandfather, Kenny Uttley's, chagrin.

"My grandparents play a big part in everything I do. My grandpa Kenny's sport is baseball, and he will still open up the baseball pages and look at me and say that he doesn't see my name there," Uttley explained. "He and my grandma are always there for me, though. He just likes to give me a hard time."

The Uttley family should have plenty to cheer about this fall, when Uttley, in his second year as team captain, looks to avenge a first-round playoff loss to Barrington.

"To tell the truth, I am still not over it. It's tough," Uttley explained. "But we have a young team, and I know that we learned from that game and will come back ready to play next year."

A strong family support system helped him work through his feelings about the loss, but his parents said that it was just another example of the kind of character Brett has.

"There were no words to console him after something like that. We just gave him lots of hugs and support and took our cues from him," his mom said.

"He was devastated, but the next day his good friend, who plays for LaSalle, was playing Portsmouth and he wanted to go. Most kids would have stayed home, but Brett called his friend and told him to play the best game he could, and he went out and cheered for him," his dad added.

It is not surprising that he offered words of encouragement to his friend because assists are his favorite part of the game.

"I really like to set up people to have them score," he said. "I would rather do that than take the ball in myself most of the time."

Sometimes words like these ring hollow from storied athletes, but in Uttley's case he practices what he says.

"He is a great, kind, caring kid. It is not all about him and he has a lot of compassion," his mom said. "That means more to me than any soccer award he could win."

Many people will be watching Brett Uttley in the next year, including several Division I universities, but don't expect him to change from all the attention.

"I will just let my playing do the talking," he said.

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