

The
Lake

Oswegan

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— Little League isn't like what daddy or big brother used to play.

— A night in Vienna will benefit the Portland Art Museum.

— Secrets of Viennese pastry making



There's a girl in Little League

However, Joey says that "she can't throw that far— she doesn't have enough muscles in her hand."

Joey is proud of the team, and says so. His pitching has helped give the team "the best record so far." (The team has lost only one game to date this season).

"I didn't think our team was going to be that good at first," he confesses, "but we turned out to be real good. We practiced a lot."

Paula's ten-year-old brother Jeff Blackburn, who is pitcher and catcher for the "Mini-Storage" Little League team says "she's real good— she's good at hitting. Sometimes we play ball together."

Then he adds jokingly, "She's the best girl in the whole National League!"

"She's the only girl in the National League," points out his friend, Mike Partlow, catcher for the "Shelter Properties" team.

"She's pretty tough," Mike continues, "not like some of the girls."

Then he adds, "Some of the coaches think she's a boy. Once she caught a fly at second base and the other coach found out after the game she was a girl."

"Shelter Properties" team third baseman and right fielder, Marcus Goldstein, says that Paula is "pretty good. She's a good hitter, catcher and thrower. I think it's really super having her on the team."

Marcus says he'd like to "see us win the championship this year. We've got the best record in the National League— 4 to 1."

By Linda Cargill
Oswegan Writer

"She's like Amanda in the 'Bad News Bears,'" comment by Don Theeler Jr. about Paula Blackburn

"Softball is kinda sissy," says 11-year-old Paula Blackburn, sweeping her shoulder length blonde hair back from her eyes, then adjusting her red baseball cap.

The sun beats down on the baseball diamond at Lake Oswego Junior High School. The only girl on the "Shelter Properties" Little League team steps up to the plate.

"HEY, STRIKE OUT SUE!" yells Don Theeler Jr., teasing his teammate affectionately.

Paula slams the ball — which is hard, not soft — past the pitcher, then torpedoes like Road Runner's liberated sister to first base. She's out, but who cares. It's just a practice, the boys on her team all like her, and the team's number one in their league.

"In softball you don't get hurt much if you get hit," says the second base (person?) with the big blue eyes and freckles. "They throw it underhanded and you have the advantage of hitting the ball. And the mitt is wider and a lot longer."

She speaks softly but resolutely, sports a winning grin, and "looks like she should hold a doll in her hand," says her mother, Pat Blackburn. "But she's always been the outdoors type."

Her coach, Don Theeler, says her strong suit is "stopping in-field grounders. She's saved our bacon a couple of times."

"The boys may be a little protective of her," Theeler says. "When we played another team, one boy yelled, 'Hey, that's a girl!' and a boy on our team, said, 'Yeah, that's a girl and don't say anything about her or I'll get angry.'" She's very well accepted.

Then he adds, "No one on the team wins or loses. We're all equal, all members of a team. We don't have any super stars or duds."

What do the boys say about their teammate?

"At the beginning of the year she had a real bad throwing problem and I helped her," Don Theeler Jr. (the coach's son) says. "She'd lob them like this."

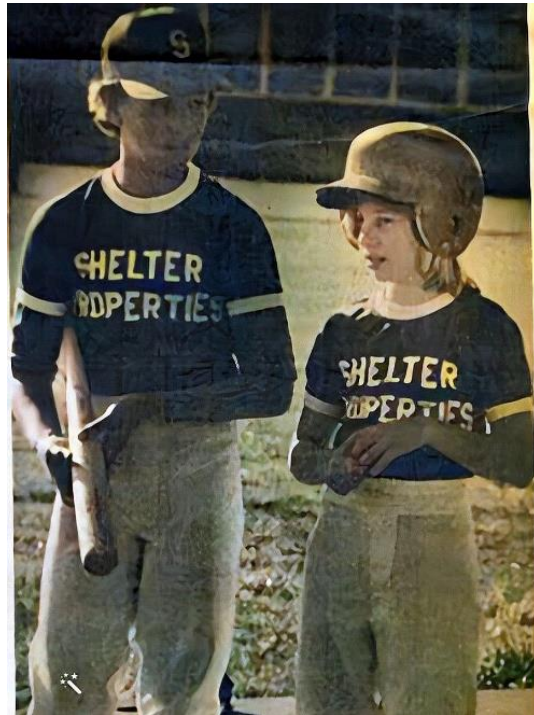
He moves his hand through the air in a weak curve.

"She'd throw like a girl, I got her to throw them further and more straight. I've never seen a girl better than her. Most girls can't even catch a ball. I'm in the Babe Ruth League and she's better than four guys on my team. She's not afraid of the hard balls."

Another teammate, Peter Hearn, whose older brother plays basketball for the Los Angeles Lakers, says, "It's sorta neat having her on the team. She's better than some of them. She's doing really good this season."

The team's pitcher, Joey Gross, says, "It's okay having her on the team. She's okay at hitting and she's pretty good at second base."

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Batter Joey Gross gives a few pointers to teammate Paula Blackburn during break in big game. "Shelter Properties" team is number one in its league. (Photos by Brent Wojahn)

It's obvious that Paula also likes her male comrades.

"I can at least practice with all the boys," she says, smiling.

Most girls in town play in the Lassie League, but they have a right to try out for the Little League. Right now 8 girls are on Lake Oswego Little League teams—7 of them on Coast League teams, which are for eight to 10 year olds. National League is more advanced, for nine to 12 year olds. American League is the best; no girls have tried for it—so far. Kids are drafted into the three leagues, with 220 trying out this year.

Paula is proud of a few of her plays. Sneaking to home plate, for instance.

"I was at third base, and I walked home," she says grinning. "The pitcher and catcher were talking. They didn't even know it."

Another time, while she was playing second base, the batter slammed the ball into her leg, hard.

"I dove for the ball," she recalls. "It hit my shin. I fell down on the ground. The guy tried to go for first and I underhand tossed it and made an out."

For a few minutes the pain got the better of her. She limped off the field, crying a little, but

quickly returned to the game.

She explains how she joins in the "chatter" with her fellow teammates, either to cheer the batter on or to distract him.

"I yell, 'GO, JOEY!' or 'GO, THEELER!' or 'HEY, BATTER, SWING!'"

Do the boys in his sixth grade class at Uplands School tease her about being on the team?

"No, they think it's neat," she says, smiling. A modest girl, she gives a lot of credit to her coach for helping her.

"Don showed me how to hold the ball, how to put pressure on the ball, throw it fast and how to follow through," she says. "And my dad has helped. He showed me how to catch and throw flies.

"As long as she decided she wanted to play baseball, I wanted to make sure she could catch that ball and be able to protect herself," says Fred Blackburn, Paula's father. "But I found out some of the boys on the team need as much protection as she does."

Blackburn says that "most of the technical end of the game she learned from her coach, Don Theeler."

Paula was lucky enough to be born into a baseball family. Her mother and father are

both Little League coaches. Her brother Jeff plays on a Little League team, the "Mini-Storage" team.

Mrs. Blackburn is rightfully proud of her daughter and is pleased the team likes her.

"She missed one game and the team was concerned about where she was," Mrs. Blackburn recalls. "She's really a nice kid. It's hard not to like her."

She says Paula's brother Jeff is glad she plays baseball because "it's something they have in common and can relate to each other with."

Paula tells how her mother once sat in the stands next to a woman who didn't realize the girl playing baseball was her daughter.

"The lady told my mother it was a disgrace to have a girl in Little League," Paula remembers. "My mom didn't say anything. She just laughed."

It's easy to see where Paula gets her good-natured sense of humor. When the boys tease her affectionately, she just laughs or jokes back with them. Like winners everywhere, she's learned to laugh at herself—to just let insults roll off her back. After all, there are more serious matters to attend to—like winning the next game. □



Mike Partlow catches a fast ball, while teammate Paula Blackburn bides her time, waiting for a hit during "Shelter Properties" Little League practice. Coach Don Theeler looks on.



Girls can throw, too! Paula Blackburn's strong right arm sends the ball sailing from her second base position on Lake Oswego Little League team.



Inspiration

Grandma was so inspired by Paula's accomplishment she wrote a poem to commemorate the event, and won an Award for it!

*Regina Blackburn
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Little League Angel

*A sweet blue eyed,
little girl;
decided one day to give,
"Little League"
A whirl.*

*When she tried out,
for the team;
the boys left out,
a scream;
but she is a girl!*

*She speaks softly and,
sports a winning grin;
plays with all her heart,
so her team will win.*

*Instead of a doll,
in her hand;
she replaces it with,
a bat and a ball;
"Number 5" who,
stands four feet tall.*

*Sweeping her shoulder
length blonde hair;
from her eyes, adjusts
her baseball cap;
and becomes one
of the guys.*

A Major Award...

