

Native athletes lead Anchorage schools

By Bill Hess

Tundra Times Staff

Doreen Ahgeak's teammates had been looking to her for leadership last Friday night in a basketball contest which they hoped would end in victory over West High. Through three quarters, the 5'5" transfer student from Barrow had controlled, shot and rebounded the ball more than anyone else from Service High, yet the score had always been close. Service was able to hold a lead, usually only one to three points ahead of their opponents from West.

Then in the middle of the fourth quarter, with Service ahead by only three, a player from West shoved Ahgeak. Ahgeak shoved back. The referee expelled both from the game. The crowd had been angry at the officials all night long; now fans from both teams booed their displeasure. Ahgeak sat down, head in hands, having scored 19 points for the game. Her average is 22.

Shelly Kohinka, center, had always been a leader on the team, and, next to Ahgeak, was the highest scorer. It would be tough to maintain the lead with Ahgeak gone, but the team met in a huddle, then broke. Kohinka joined her mates in a victory yell, and charged back onto the playing floor.

When the game ended, Service had defeated West by a score of 39 to 36. Of those 39 points, 30 had been scored by Ahgeak and Kohinka. The two have been the undisputed leaders this year in a season which has seen Service rise from a non-contender position to ranking of fifth in the state, and a current standing of second in the Anchorage League. Both girls are Alaska Native; Kohinka a Tsimshian, and Ahgeak an Inupiat Eskimo.

"I just keep saying we're going to get it back together, we're going to win!" Kohinka describes bad moments in competition, like when her teammate was removed from the game. "I always know we can win, I knew we would win. We just need to stick together."

"Basketball is my favorite hobby," Ahgeak, a guard, explains the enthusiasm which has enabled her to become a star at a short height. She is also top rebounder on the team, unusual for a guard. "It's just what I grew up with. In Barrow we had a gym, and that's where I spent all my time, playing basketball." As much as seven hours a day.

Ahgeak received inspiration and encouragement from her parents, Charlie and Beverly Ahgeak. "Both my mom and my dad played basketball," she explains. In fact, they were both named "most valuable player" of their teams at Mount Edgumbe High School at Sitka.

Although Ahgeak's parents live in Barrow, they still sup-

port her. During the Christmas holidays, Beverly Ahgeak flew all the way from Barrow to Anchorage to watch her daughter play an important game.

Ahgeak does regret the incident which got her expelled from the game with West. "I was just sad, that on my part I didn't control myself better."

"Doreen is a player with very good control," adds her coach, Bob Ferguson, "who usually would not let such a thing happen to her. She was just provoked to a point where it was hard not to do something. In a way, it had to happen. You can't let yourself be intimidated."

Although Service won the game, Ferguson does not feel it was one of their better games. The girls agree, going so far to describe it as perhaps the toughest game they have played this season. "We play a more controlled game than this normally," Ferguson explains. "Tonight, we played their game. We found ourselves running up and down the floor."

The girls pledge this won't happen again; especially when they next face East. East is currently leading the league. Already they have defeated Service twice; once by four points, and then by nine. Yet in both games, Service led at halftime, and sometime built up leads as high as 15 points. "I guess our team didn't hold out long enough," Ahgeak says. "We needed more stamina."

"We're going to beat them this time," claims Kohinka. "We're going to take the state championship." Kohinka also took up basketball at an early age. "I started playing when I was nine," she explains, because of my height." Kohinka figures she was about as tall at nine as Ahgeak is now. Today, she stands five feet, 11 and a half inches. Like Ahgeak, she receives much support from her parents. Her mother can usually be heard cheering above the other students.

Both stars are seniors now, and hope to continue playing ball in college. There is no active recruitment program for womens' basketball in Alaska. Kohinka plans to attend the University of Alaska at Anchorage. Ahgeak does not yet know where she wants to go, but has applied at several colleges. "I didn't tell them I played basketball," she says.

This omission should not complicate Ahgeak's chances for admittance. When asked what her grades are, Ahgeak modestly says, "They're better than they used to be." She is an honor student. Her last report card showed five A's and one B.

Coach Ferguson has his own ideas as to why these two students have developed into such

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Perserverance, love, put

athletes on top

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outstanding basketball players.

"Shelly has so much perseverance," he explains. "She has stuck with basketball for many years. She has a lot of potential. She still hasn't realized just how much potential she has. She is going to develop into a better ball player yet. I believe it is her love for the game that has kept her going, that has made her good.

"In Dorene, I see an innate love for the game. She just loves basketball. You can't keep her out of the gym. She has unbelievable amounts of potential. She does as many things well as anybody I have seen. A lot of this comes because of her control of her energy. She is a tough player; a competitor from the word go.

"I'm really pleased and happy to have both; to have been able to work with two real Alaskans, who have shown their class in the biggest city in the state. They have made all of Service proud."