

Player of the year: Puyallup's Kelsey Robinson

Not many teenagers want to toil for hours in the family garage, but Kelsey Robinson used the time wisely as the Puyallup junior became a dominant pitcher



Dean J. Koepfler THE NEWS TRIBUNE

A bright future is ahead of Puyallup pitcher Kelsey Robinson, whose hard work in the family garage resulted in a dominant junior season. (Dean J. Koepfler / Tacoma News Tribune Staff photographer)

As an electrical inspector, Mike Robinson knows a thing or two about construction.

So when he poured a concrete floor in his new garage, it was no accident that he left a dirt hole 8 feet long by 4 feet wide.

After filling that hole flush with dirt, installing a pitcher's rubber and adding a home plate precisely 43 feet away, Mike Robinson suddenly became one of the coolest dads west of the Puyallup River.

It's in that backyard garage where his daughter, Kelsey Robinson, dug in and got a leg up on the competition before this fastpitch season.

"It's probably a couple years late for her to get the full benefit out of it," said Mike Robinson, who finished the garage and indoor pitcher's mound over the winter. "If she probably had this a couple years ago, she'd really be something."

Another comment like that and Kelsey Robinson is apt to knock her dad off the bucket he sits on during father-and-daughter pitching sessions on their property just outside the Puyallup city limits.

Kelsey Robinson has shown that she can bring the heat on occasion. But mostly it's been the Puyallup High School junior's uncanny accuracy and ball movement that has baffled hitters and led to her being named The News Tribune's All-Area Player of the Year in fastpitch.

Robinson record is 18-4 with a 0.81 earned-run average this season for Puyallup, the South Puget Sound League's No. 2 seed in the Class 4A West Central District tournament Friday and Saturday at Sprinker Recreation Center.

In 129²/₃ innings, she has struck out 152 batters and walked seven.

"What sets her above everyone is her movement on the ball," said Amber Tomlinson, a senior who has caught Robinson for three seasons. "She can really make the ball curve."

And make batters' eyes get big.

"A lot of them freeze," said Kylie McChesney, Puyallup's junior shortstop. "She likes that outside corner. And she'll work them all day on that outside.

"She'll figure out the ump's strike zone and she'll work it to her advantage. If he's calling outside or inside that day, she's going to work it all day long."

Puyallup coach Tony Batinovich sees Robinson's success as a product of her devotion and work ethic.

He's watched her develop into one of Puyallup's all-time best pitchers and figures she'll own virtually all of the school's pitching records by the end of next season.

She already has struck out 459 batters and walked 45 in three seasons as the Vikings' starter.

She's also emerged as a force at the plate, batting .447 with 24 RBI this season.

"She's such a humble young lady," Batinovich said. "She's just as good a person as she is a softball player. She's a very nice young lady, a little goofy, which is good.

"You've got to be in that position because the spotlight is on you quite a bit. She just enjoys the game. She works really hard at it in the offseason. She works on her craft."

For Robinson, it's all about practice and getting the right help.

She received pitching instruction from Puyallup resident Lance Glasoe before he became the pitching coach at the University of Washington. She most recently has worked with Tiffany McVay, former Virginia Tech pitching coach and East Tennessee State star.

Pitching in fastpitch involves so many body parts it can make one's head spin. A curve ball, for instance, involves exact footwork, head placement, dipping the elbow, snapping the wrist and spinning the ball with the fingers.

“Lance helped me a lot,” Robinson said. “He taught me how to throw a lot of pitches.”

And she’ll continue to work on her craft. She also plays club softball with the Washington Sidewinders. College recruiters will be looking on intently.

“This is kind of my big summer,” said Robinson, who figures she’ll be travelling with her club team 45 days this summer.

At least when she wants to tinker with a pitch at home, she won’t have to go far.

Mike and Paula Robinson had that in mind when they built the 50-foot garage with the unique sports features. Their son, Zack, 12, also is a pitcher who spends a lot of time in the garage.

For now, the family vehicles must stay outdoors.

“Right now, there’s just no room in there,” Mike Robinson said. “They have to pitch in there. There’s a pop-up net with a batting tee. There’s a pingpong table. I’ve got a little closet with tools in it but it’s pretty much sports right now. It’s kind of pathetic, really.”

Robinson said he still remembers the days not too many years ago when his daughter struggled to get an out.

“She’s had a lot of opportunities to give up and quit,” he said.

“She’s persevered. We’re really fortunate. I don’t know what we did right but she’s a great kid.”