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## Lauded local basketball player back in the Bay Area

By Jon Kingdon



Sabrina Ionescu Photos Gint Federas

A triple-double in basketball occurs when a player records a double-digit total in a game in three of the following categories: points, rebounds, assists and blocks. To accomplish such a feat requires a player with all-around skills.

As a sophomore at the University of Oregon last season, Sabrina Ionescu broke the NCAA triple-double career record for women with her eighth triple-double. This season Ionescu surpassed the men's record of 12 (BYU's Kyle Collinsworth) and currently has a total of 16 triple-doubles and is still going. When questioned about the accomplishment, Ionescu shrugged and replied, "It's just another thing I do."

Having been named the USA Today High School Player of the Year at Miramonte High School, Freshman Player of the Year at Oregon, first team All-American as a sophomore and preseason All-American prior to this season, it's understandable how Ionescu would acknowledge such a record so casually.

On Feb. 8, Oregon played at the University of California, coming away with a 105-82 victory, with Ionescu scoring 27 points with 5 rebounds and 4 assists. It was something of a homecoming for Ionescu as she explained after the game: "Playing in Haas Pavilion felt like being at home with so many of my family and

friends and coach (Kelly) Sopak and the Miramonte girls basketball team in attendance." In front of an equally supportive group two days later, Oregon and Ionescu (27 points, 9 rebounds, 8 assists) defeated Stanford on their home court of Maples Pavilion for the first time in 29 years by a score of 88-48.

Ionescu attributes much of her success at Oregon to having played under Sopak at Miramonte and on his club team Cal Stars: "Playing for Kelly at Miramonte and with Cal Stars really helped me, coming from such a winning program, teaching me to strive for excellence."

The connection between Sopak and Ionescu began when she was 9 years old, says Sopak: "Sabrina was one of the better players when she began but it wasn't until she was in seventh grade when it became very evident that she was a very special player."

It's not just Ionescu's physical tools that Sopak admires: "In breaking the triple-double record, it's easy to explain. Sabrina has the ability, but it's that she has a true mind for the game and competes on every play."

Though right-handed, Ionescu prefers to dribble the ball left-handed and will shoot left-handed as well, having developed those skills at Miramonte, says Sopak: "In high school, most teams want to force you to go to the left so we practice and play where our point guards work hard to run out practice to the left so they learn how to dribble with their left hand as well as their right."

It's something of a family affair between the Ionescus and the Sopaks, says Sopak's wife, Beverly: "We've known Sabrina and her family since she was in the third grade. She has been like family to us. We often had her and her family come over on Thanksgiving and Christmas. Sabrina still really cares about Miramonte and reaches out to the players on the team."

As a coach's wife, Beverly Sopak has her own opinion as to what makes Ionescu so successful: "She is her own worst critic. She is harder on herself than anybody, which is what drives her."

The Sopak's daughter, Lauren, who played with Ionescu at Miramonte, attends the University of Oregon and is also a roommate of Ionescu and Sabrina's brother: "Sabrina is like a mother to us, making sure that we eat right, go to sleep early and get to school on time. She has a great sense of humor."

Ionescu has often spoke of playing basketball as a "blessing" and only reluctantly will leave the court. Lauren saw this firsthand in a high school game: "Sabrina loves to play the game and never wants to come out. One time she got a technical foul and my dad pulled her out of the game. She sat next to him and constantly nudged him to keep reminding him that she was out of the game."

Ionescu graduated from Miramonte with a composite won-lost record of 125-9. So far, in the nearly three seasons with Ionescu, the Ducks have a record of 79-20 and are currently ranked third in the nation with a 23-1 record. Like a fine wine, Ionescu only seems to get better with age.



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