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SPORTS

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SECTION B

YOUTH SPORTS

Making dad proud

Bond builds as teen excels at hockey rink

After years of searching, Garrett Neesen finally found the right sport.

Throughout early childhood, he tried soccer, football, wrestling, basketball and baseball. None sparked his interest or left him wanting to play more.

That changed when his father, Mike Neesen, introduced him to hockey.

"I love it," said Garrett, an eighth-grader at Greenwood Middle School, who started playing hockey at age 6. "I love everything about it: passing, shooting, scoring, teamwork."

Hockey has been a major part of Garrett's life since he first took to the ice. His father played recreational hockey in his younger days, and the pair have developed a special bond through the sport.

For eight years, Mike raised Garrett as a single father. Garrett's mother left the home after Garrett turned 2, Neesen said. They have not seen her since.

Neesen remarried four years ago and still is active in Garrett's interests, especially hockey.

During Garrett's childhood, Neesen involved his son in his own sports and hobbies. Wherever Neesen went, Garrett tagged along, including when Neesen went rock climbing.

Garrett wasn't even 3 when Neesen took him to Red River Gorge, Ky., to climb boulders together.

"At that age, (Garrett) didn't have

(SEE BOND, PAGE B3)

THE NEESEN FILE

Name: Garrett Neesen
Age: 14
Grade: Eighth
School: Greenwood Middle School
Residence: Greenwood
Parents' names: Mike Neesen and Holly Henry-Neesen, stepmom
Siblings: Half sisters Lyndsey, 19; Bryttany, 18; and Shelby, 12; stepbrother, Gavin, 8; stepsister, Skyler, 19 months
Hobbies: Hockey, playing guitar and skateboarding
Other sports: Football. He played left guard and defensive end for Greenwood Middle School.
Hockey uniform number: 16
One thing people don't know about him: Started rock-climbing at 2½ years old

Garrett Neesen, a Greenwood Middle School eighth-grader, takes a shot while practicing with the Indianapolis Arctic Blast, a Bantam AA1 14- and 15-year-old youth travel hockey team, in Westfield on Thursday.

Young player happy with win in tournament

Garrett Neesen loves the thrill of being on the ice. Now the 14-year-old has experienced the exhilaration of winning a championship.

"It was special," said Neesen, a Greenwood resident. "I've never won a big championship before."

Neesen, an eighth-grader at Greenwood Middle School, plays hockey for the Indianapolis Arctic Blast, a Bantam AA1 14- and 15-year-old youth travel team.

Recently, the defenseman experienced one of the biggest highlights of his young career while playing for the team. On Jan. 15, the Blast won the Silver Stick International Hockey Tournament championship in Forest, Ontario, Canada. The Blast defeated Grand Valley, from Ontario, 4-3 in overtime, becoming the first bantam team from Indianapolis to win the title.

After building a 3-0 lead, the Blast yielded three goals in the final five minutes, which sent the game into overtime. But Blast defenseman Michael O'Sickey scored the winning goal, which sent players, parents and fans into a frenzy.

"Everybody went crazy," Neesen said. "There were gloves in the air, sticks flying and (there was) lots of hugging. We jumped on Mike in a big pile and took pictures."

"It was just great."

After winning the championship, the first person Neesen called was his father.

(SEE PLAYER, PAGE B3)

STORIES BY JOHN GROTH • PHOTO BY MATT OOLEY

Double trouble for Pacers

No team has stopped Arenas, Bryant lately

By CLIFF BRUNT
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

INDIANAPOLIS

The Indiana Pacers, already reeling from injuries and a five-game losing streak, will face two of the league's top scorers in Gilbert Arenas, left, today, then return home Wednesday to face the Los Angeles Lakers.

The Pacers go to Washington tonight to face Arenas, then return home Wednesday to play Bryant's Los Angeles Lakers. Bryant leads the league with 35.9 points per game and Arenas ranks fourth with 28.1 points per game.

The Pacers, 21-21, are in danger of falling below .500 midway through a season that began with NBA title hopes. They'll try to bounce back against the two opponents who have put up the highest point totals against them this season.

Arenas had 37 points and eight assists to lead Washington to a 94-85 win in Indianapolis on Jan. 13.

Bryant scored 45 points, along with 10 rebounds and five assists in a 96-90 win against the Pacers in Los Angeles on Jan. 9. He scored 81 points, second most in NBA history, against Toronto on Jan. 22.

"They're not only scoring points against us, they're scoring points against anybody," Pacers guard Sarunas Jasikevicius said. "They're two of the best scorers in the NBA, and guys the whole NBA's trying to stop, and it's not working."

Arenas and Bryant proved to be unstoppable in the fourth quarters of their games against the

(SEE PACERS, PAGE B2)

Talent deciding factor when forgiving athletes

Professional athletes certainly have a way of blurring our memories.

Take last week's Ron Artest trade and Kobe Bryant's 81-point outburst.

Neither Artest nor Bryant is likely to win the Person of the Year award from Time magazine anytime soon. But their past transgressions seem to have been forgotten now that Artest has a fresh start and Bryant is scoring almost at will.

First, let's look at the Artest situation. Artest's problems while with the Pacers are well-documented. When you're arguably one of the best players in the NBA and yet few people seem to be upset that you're leaving town, you know you've done something wrong.

Still, Sacramento officials were all too happy to welcome Artest after the Kings acquired the troubled forward in exchange for Peja Stojakovic.

Why? Because Artest possesses immense talent. And talent trumps everything else in professional sports.

I watched, listened and read much of the reaction

(SEE TALENT, PAGE B2)

Alexander gets chance to shine outside Seattle

By GREGG BELL
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DETROIT

There is somebody who can beat NFL MVP Shaun Alexander at his own game.

Erik Anderson, the founder of the American Foundation for ... Chess?

Alexander said the Seattle-area entrepreneur is the most recent person to beat him at one of his many loves outside of football.

"Yep, first or second week of the season. But he got lucky," Alexander said, feigning disgust.

Alexander is at the top of his day-job profession this week, a potential Seahawks free agent, league rushing champion and NFL record holder with 28 touchdowns this season.

And he is about to play in its ultimate game, Sunday's Super Bowl against Pittsburgh.

Yet chess is just one of the many sides to Alexander that the nation never sees.

Much of it remembers Alexander for lashing out at Mike Holmgren after the 2004 regular-season finale, after the coach called a quarterback kneel-down instead of one additional run that could have given Alexander the rushing title.

Instead, Alexander finished 1 yard behind the New York Jets' Curtis Martin and infamously said Holmgren "stabbed me in the back," an incident both men now say was overblown.

Much of the nation doesn't

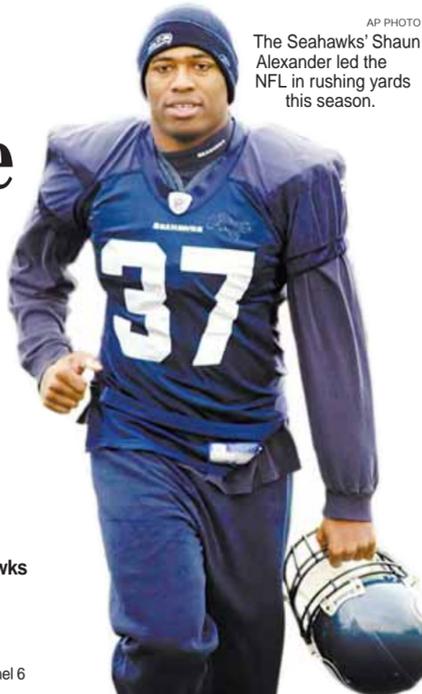
(SEE ALEXANDER, PAGE B3)



SUPER BOWL

Seattle Seahawks vs. Pittsburgh Steelers

Time: 6 p.m.
 Sunday
 TV: WRTV-Channel 4



AP PHOTO
 The Seahawks' Shaun Alexander led the NFL in rushing yards this season.

Expectations grow with Tiger's first win of year

By DOUG FERGUSON
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

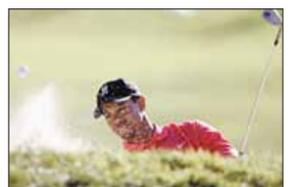
SAN DIEGO

Tiger Woods stepped into the chill of the evening and headed to the airport for a 20-hour flight to Dubai, plenty of time to contemplate how fortunate he was to escape Torrey Pines with another victory and to wonder where it will take him the rest of the year.

Expectations figure to be greater than ever.

Woods once said the public tends to exaggerate the state of his game, perhaps because he can make it look easy. Win one tournament, and people say he's unbeatable. Go a month without winning, and he's in a slump.

"I've been out here long enough to have seen both ends of the spectrum," Woods said of the expecta-



AP PHOTO
 Tiger Woods blasts out of the bunker on the 17th hole during the final round of the Buick Invitational golf tournament Sunday in San Diego.

tions. "They're always high. They've seen what I can do, and they think I can hit some shots. It's awfully nice that they think I can do that."

But his track record suggests another big year could be in the making.

(SEE GROW, PAGE B3)