

## Where there's a Wills ...

Davidson Day soccer standout always finds way to make her point

by **Aaron Garcia**  
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When asked, Brianna Wills struggles to explain the season-long offensive outburst that has elevated her status to perhaps the area's most prolific goal scorer – not just in northern Mecklenburg, but the entire county.

After a few seconds of contemplation, Wills begins to explain the difference in skill level between club and high school soccer. The Davidson Day junior also mentions how she's always been an offensive player, be it in recreation-league, club or high school soccer. That, actually, is pretty surprising in a sport where players often are shuffled around the field as they develop. But Wills has been a forward since she began playing the game at age 4.

As Wills details her soccer background, the real answer to *how* she puts the ball in the net so easily comes to her mind.

"I guess it's just what I do," she said with a shrug. "I score. I just go to the goal."

Sometimes, the simplest answer is the most telling. In Wills' case, that certainly appears to be true. This season, she's been a goal-scoring machine, notching a mind-numbing 33 goals in eleven games. She's scored six goals in a game on two different occasions and also had a three-game stretch in which she's totaled 13 goals.

"I expected her to be able to do that," said Patriots coach Chad Metzler. "She's played with me for a while in club situations. She does what she does here, even at a much higher level. Normally it's not six goals in a game – it's like two. But she kind of is one of the go-to players and is able to really step up and get what's needed done."

Metzler might have seen it coming, but Wills said she had no idea what to expect from this current season and her new situation.



Aaron Garcia/Herald photo

After spending the previous two seasons at Providence Day and Pine Lake Prep, Brianna Wills has found a home at Davidson Day School, where she leads the team in scoring.

For 10 years, Wills made the trek from her home in Cornelius to south Charlotte's Providence Day School. Every day was a two-hour round trip. After her freshman year, a confluence of circumstances caused her family to rethink its choice of schools.

First of all, Wills was approaching driving age, and the thought of spending the gas money and time needed to get to Providence Day began to seem unnecessary. The economy also played a part, as it became harder and harder to justify the drive.

"Everything was getting so time-consuming," she said, "so why go down there when I could come here and have just as good of an education for a lot less time?"

Last year, she enrolled at Mooresville's Pine Lake Prep, but the school didn't have a varsity soccer program. This year, she decided to transfer to Davidson Day, allowing Metzler to coach her at both the high school and club levels.

"Davidson Day was a better fit with (Metzler) here," she explained.

It also helped that her best friend – team captain and midfielder Katy Leonard – was on the team.

"I couldn't do a lot of this without Katy," Wills said.

Wills has played with Leonard for the past several years for Lake Norman Soccer Club, a high-level travel team, while most of the Davidson Day players only

(see **Wills** on page 40)

## the BOTTOM LINE

### AIR PLAY

#### SATURDAY, APRIL 17

NHL hockey: Quarterfinal playoff game, 1 p.m. (WCNC)  
College football: Auburn spring game, 2 p.m. (ESPNU)  
NBA basketball: First-round playoff game, 3 p.m. (WSOC)  
College football: Alabama spring game, 3 p.m. (ESPN)  
Champions Tour golf: Outback Steakhouse Pro-Am, 4 p.m. (WCNC)  
NBA basketball: First-round playoff game, 5:30 p.m. (ESPN)  
NBA basketball: First-round playoff game, 8 p.m. (ESPN)  
High school basketball: Jordan Brand Classic, 8 p.m. (ESPN2)  
NBA basketball: First-round playoff game, 10:30 p.m. (ESPN)

#### SUNDAY, APRIL 18

Women's tennis: Family Circle Cup, 1 p.m. (ESPN2)  
NBA basketball: First-round playoff game, 3 p.m. (WSOC)  
Auto racing: Samsung Mobile 500, 3 p.m. (FOX)  
NHL hockey: Quarterfinal playoff game, 3 p.m. (WCNC)  
NBA basketball: First-round playoff game, 5:30 p.m. (TNT)  
Major League Baseball: Mets at Cardinals, 8 p.m. (ESPN)  
NBA basketball: First-round playoff game, 8 p.m. (TNT)  
NBA basketball: First-round playoff game, 10:30 p.m. (TNT)

### CAN'T-MISS GAMES

#### FRIDAY, APRIL 16

**Baseball:** Lake Norman High School at North Mecklenburg, 7 p.m.  
**Boys lacrosse:** North Mecklenburg at Hopewell, 7:30 p.m.

#### WEDNESDAY, APRIL 21

**Baseball:** East Mecklenburg at Hopewell, 7 p.m.  
**Lacrosse:** North Mecklenburg at Lake Norman Charter, 6 p.m.

#### THURSDAY, APRIL 22

**Softball:** North Mecklenburg at Butler, 5 p.m.  
**Boys tennis:** Hopewell at North Mecklenburg, 4 p.m.

#### FRIDAY, APRIL 23

**Boys lacrosse:** Lake Norman Charter at Hopewell, 6:30 p.m.



# Sports

## Wills

(continued from page 37)

competed on the high school squad. Certainly there would be an adjustment, but a serendipitous decision on Wills' part made the transition a bit smoother: She played basketball for the first time this past winter.

"It was really good for me that I played basketball because being so inexperienced, the girls helped me out," she said.

Sure, there were physical benefits. Wills said the footwork she picked up on the hardwood has already translated to the soccer field. The real advantage, she said, was that the move taught her patience, which has come in handy as she has assimilated to her new team.

"I didn't even know what a jump shot was when I first stepped on the court," she said with a chuckle.

It didn't take too long for her to start to understand the game, and by the end of the season, her ability to score manifested itself on the court. She even had 14 points to lead the Patriots during the team's final home game. Through it all, she learned how it felt to be one of the least-talented players, which has helped her in soccer.

"It helps me get a lot less frustrated, because it can be frustrating at times, not being able to do as much as I feel I could," she explained.

As a result, Metzler said he's seen Wills become one of the soccer team's unequivocal leaders, despite the fact that she's new to the program.

"From a team leadership standpoint,"

the coach said, "she's done a tremendous job of stepping up and helping teach the girls how to play. (It's not just going out and doing her thing but really putting in a lot of time working with (the other players)."

While the team had a modest 4-4-1 record, the Patriots have had some setbacks this season. For one, senior goalkeeper Elizabeth Buehler broke her hand, leaving eighth-grader Hannah Beck to mind the net. Scores of other injuries have popped up, and even Wills has sprained her ankle several times. Nonetheless, she's remained positive and continued to help her less-experienced teammates. After her basketball experience, she now knows how it feels to be the player trying to prove her worth.

"The girls who played basketball, they stood by me," she said. "I could tell they got frustrated with me, but they still stood with me, so that also helped me take on the leadership role after knowing how it felt on both sides."

For Metzler, the benefit of Wills' and Leonard's leadership is starting to show.

"One of the things we're starting to see is ... a more well-rounded team," he said. "We're getting more aggressive play out of the midfielders. As that improves, it makes everything much easier."


The fact that Wills already is one of the team's leaders is extremely telling.

"I think the fact that she's not (a captain) and has still taken on that leadership role speaks a lot for her character and her willingness," said Metzler.

Apparently, it's just what she does. T

Davidson Day junior Brianna Wills is one of the top goal scorers in Mecklenburg County.

Aaron Garcia/Herald photo



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**THE HERALD WEEKLY** Student Athlete of the Week

### Anna Landis

HT.: 5-foot-4  
CLASS: 2012  
PARENT'S NAME: Martha and Rich Landis  
SCHOOL SPORTS HISTORY: Three years varsity basketball, three years varsity softball and two years varsity cross-country.  
ACADEMIC ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Honor Roll since middle school; BETA Club; Math Olympics  
POST-HIGH SCHOOL PLANS: Play at least one sport in college.  
ATHLETE MOST ADMIRER: My dad  
BIGGEST THRILL IN SPORTS: Succeeding in something that the team or I have been working on to improve.  
FAVORITE MUSICAL GROUP: Taylor Swift  
BEST BOOK READ RECENTLY: "The Hiding Place" by Corrie ten Boom  
FAVORITE MOVIE: "Braveheart"  
FAVORITE FOOD: Cheese

The Herald Weekly Student Athlete of the Week is a regular feature that recognizes top student athletes at Lake Norman area high schools. Criteria for and selection of the athletes is developed independently by the administration and athletic staff at each school.