

# *From the Field to the Sidelines: Laird Enters the Hall*

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of the Journal**

EPHRATA — There are a couple things you need to know about 2022 Ephrata Athletic Hall of Fame inductee Jacob Laird if you want to understand what type of an athlete, he was during his playing days at Ephrata High School.



Thing #1: He looked up to “The Boz” as a kid. That’s right. The 2014 EHS graduate didn’t idolize the stars of his day like Ray Lewis or Brian Urlacher; Brian Bosworth was his guy.

With a high energy motor and desire for contact, The Boz being Laird’s guy as a kid only makes sense.

That leads to the second thing you need to know about Laird; he likes to hit things and be physical.

When asked what he loved about playing on the offensive and defensive lines in high school, his answer couldn’t have been more fitting considering his personality and who he looked up to as a kid.

“What did I love about the offensive and defensive lines? I loved hitting someone every play,” he said matter of factly.

One last thing you need to know about Laird is that he comes from an athletically-inclined family. His dad, David, played college football, his mom, Amy, played basketball, tennis and did cheer, his brother, Mac, was a state champion wrestler, and his sisters, Lauren and Kyra, were talented softball players.

With that sort of a family pedigree, it only seemed fitting for Laird to dawn the Ephrata black and orange someday.

“Growing up my dad was always coaching and I would always go with him to his games and always saw myself out there. So, I have to give him and my mom of course a huge shout out,” he said. “Having my name in the Ephrata Hall of Fame is a huge honor and something that I am very proud of.”

Laird established a name for himself playing football, basketball and on the track team, but his first sport was wrestling actually. Laird started wrestling at the age of five and got into swimming at the age of six.

“We didn’t have middle school sports here in Ephrata when I was in school. We had intramurals,” he explained. “At the time you don’t even think about it because growing up in Ephrata that is all you know. You gotta go through intramurals to play organized sports in high school.”

“Then in high school you kind of figure out all these other towns had middle school sports,” he continued.

Despite not being able to compete against other schools, the young Laird was still able to see where his skills truly were before entering high school. Laird was on Ephrata’s C-Team for football as a ninth grader and played in the varsity team’s final game that season.

As Laird grew into his body and developed as a football player, his reputation grew as well. Over the course of his time playing for coach Jay Mills, Laird was named CWAC Offensive Player of the Year as a senior and was all-state his junior and senior years.

“It was just a lot of fun. I mean we didn’t win a state championship or anything, but we had good teams each year and weren’t pushovers,” he stated.

Even though it wasn’t his main sport, Laird wasn’t too shabby on the hardwood either. He wasn’t out there to shoot threes or score 30 points a game playing basketball. Laird had a clear role for the Tigers and — true to form — had no problem doing what was asked of him.

“I was out there mostly for rebounding. That was my role. I loved it down there banging around against the big guys,” he said with a big grin.

Basketball occupied Laird’s time over the winter months and kept him in good shape for the track and field season each spring. Track didn’t necessarily scratch that itch of hitting things and being physical against an opponent, but it did satisfy Laird’s desire to compete.

“I found out about track in middle school during intramurals. I was pretty good at the discus, so I wanted to try that out in high school,” he explained. “Track is fun. It’s an organized picnic. You get to go out there and hang out with your friends at the meets. It’s just a lot of fun.”

Laird mainly threw the discus —with the exception of his freshman year when he ran the 110-meter hurdles and went to districts— and found unprecedented success.

“Sophomore year I was fourth at state, third my junior year and first as a senior,” he said.

Around his junior year is when Laird said he started receiving interest from colleges who wanted him to play football for them. He even visited schools like Eastern and Central Washington Universities and Simon Fraser University in British Columbia.

“Then I was thinking that I kind of wanted to do track too. So I talked to the track coaches at Washington State University and they wanted to have me and I realized I could just walk-on the football team,” he explained. “I redshirted my freshman year in football and track. I never got to play in any football games at WSU, but I did get to travel with the team.”

Despite not getting the playing time he would have liked, being on the football team at WSU was still a dream come true for Laird as an eastern Washington kid. He had been to Pullman for games as a youngster, but the experience was drastically different as a member of the team.

“Coming out of the locker room onto the field was a pretty surreal experience for me,” he recalls. “I had been there numerous times for games growing up, but once you are down there on the field it is a different world.”

Similar to football, Laird didn’t compete in track during his time at WSU.

“I was still trying to focus on football. I figured I would do track along with football, but prioritize football. So on weekends when there would be track meets, we would still be doing spring football and workouts. So I kept in shape with track and kept working out with them, but I kept football as my focus.”

Laird was at WSU for three years until he decided to move back home in 2017, where he quickly found a job as a field-man at Simplot. All that led up to Laird taking a job this year as defensive coordinator for Soap Lake High School’s football team. Laird’s good friend — Garrett Devine — was named head coach in Soap Lake after former coach Tony Blankenship stepped down and asked Laird if he wanted to coach the defense for him.

“I went to my boss at Simplot and said I wanted to coach and asked if it was something they could work with. They said absolutely, so I called Garrett the next morning and told him I was in,” he said.

Soap Lake football is different from Ephrata though. The Eagles play eight-man football, which requires entirely different defensive schemes from what Laird was accustomed to.

“I actually drew-up a bunch of plays and defensive schemes and I showed them to Garrett and he said, ‘yeah, that would work, but we play eight-man,’” Laird jokes. “I had heard of eight-man, but before I took the job I had never seen an eight-man game.”

Laird is now tasked with game planning against teams that can put a lot of points on the board. Laird and the Eagles experienced that first-hand in their season opener against Wilbur-Creston earlier this month. The scoreboard read Wilbur-Creston 80 and Soap Lake 0 at the end of the contest.

A disappointing start to Laird’s coaching career for sure, but an even more disappointing start to the season for the kids on the team. As a coach part of Laird’s job is to help his players see the bigger picture and to not let a loss like the Wilbur-Creston one impact their love for the game and desire to play it.

Laird is fully aware of the impact he can have on his players, due in part to the impact Mills had on him during his playing days.

“I called him when I took the job and explained to him that I hoped I would have the same impact on the kids that he had on me. I really appreciated him as a coach,” Laird remarked.

One of the biggest lessons Laird said he learned from Mills that came in handy following Soap Lake’s season opener?

“He just always taught me to be positive no matter what happens.”