

## Xavier's Trcka at home on the lanes

Written by Sher Jasperse

Wednesday, 07 December 2011 17:05 - Last Updated Wednesday, 07 December 2011 22:28

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No, Tara Trcka was not born in a bowling alley. It just seems that way.

“I grew up here ever since I can remember,” she says of May City Bowl, which her parents purchased the year before she was born. “It’s been my second home.”

The Xavier junior hoisted her first bowling ball – a 6-pound “Mini-Mouse” – at age 3 and never stopped rolling.

Through untold hours spent practicing and competing in youth leagues over the last 13 years, she has rolled her way into elite company among high school bowlers.

Trcka (pronounced “terch-ka”) is part of a large Czech-heritage family that is loaded with bowlers. Her parents, aunts, uncles and cousins all bowl, she says.

Cousin Allie Trcka, who bowled for Jefferson, finished seventh in the Class 2A state tournament last year, and Allie’s brother Zach bowls for Jeff this year.

But Tara is the undisputed queen of the pins – especially at May City Bowl, where she practices two nights a week with her team, works part-time, and plays tournaments on weekends.

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Trcka has been Xavier's No. 1 bowler since her freshman year, and last year she pulled off an improbable victory in the Class 1A state bowling championship.

"There was a lot of drama leading up to that," says her coach, Russ Camacho. And it didn't end until the final ball hit its mark.

Trcka had injured her middle finger in a tangle with a ball-return machine late in the season, making her questionable for district competition.

"My dad wrapped my finger in bio-skin tape and made my finger insert larger so it would fit," says Trcka.

She rolled a disappointing 388 at the district meet – well below her series average of 430-440 – and was initially left off the list of state qualifiers.

Late in the day, Camacho realized that Trcka's sub-par score nonetheless placed her higher than some of the girls headed to state. After a flurry of e-mails, Trcka was added to the list of at-large state qualifiers.

In an unforgettable clutch performance, she clinched the state title by three pins in her final frame. Camacho, who coaches boys and girls bowling, track and sophomore football for Xavier, still shakes himself at the memory.

"That ranks right up there as one of the most intense moments I've had as a coach," he recalls. "It took a lot of confidence for her to step up in that 10th frame and know what she had to do and do it."

That confidence has propelled her to the top tier among state bowlers and made her the unquestioned leader of the bowling Saints, he adds.

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“She’s focused. The more she’s pressed, the more focused she becomes. That’s one of the traits that makes her what she is,” says Camacho, who describes her as the best bowler – boy or girl – he has ever coached.

Trcka pulled off another clutch win in this year’s season opener, rolling two strikes in her final frame to snatch a four-pin victory over perennial favorite Jefferson. Her first round series score of 478 bested the next closest score by more than 100 pins.

In spite of her unmatched prowess in the Metro, says Camacho, she remains utterly coachable.

“She’s open to suggestions and she doesn’t think she knows more than anyone else. A lot of athletes have the potential to be good,” he notes, “but many are not willing to do what it takes to improve.”

He adds that she is not only a gifted bowler, but “a very, very good person, well-rounded.”

Trcka sings in the Xavier choir, is a member of two school clubs, and last week – after much soul-searching and with Camacho’s encouragement – missed her first high school bowling meet to attend Xavier’s Kairos Retreat, where students explore their faith.

Her team lost to Dubuque Hempstead, but Trcka and her coach took away nothing but positives, as Trcka and her teammates both grew through the experience.

This week she’ll be back to lead the Saints against Linn-Mar. “I try to be an encourager for my team,” she says. “I just keep trying to improve individually and as a whole with my team.”

Trcka’s high-water marks in high school competition are a 278 game and a 514 series. She has bowled two 300 games, both within the past year, but is perhaps proudest of the

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Sportsmanship Award she won last year at the end of the Greater Iowa Scholarship Bowling Tour season.

She hopes to earn a college bowling scholarship and go on to bowl professionally, following in the footsteps of her personal hero, Kelly Kulick, who last year became the first woman to win a Professional Bowlers Association tournament.

Camacho doesn't doubt she can excel at the next level. "She's got a drive that very few athletes have," he says.

Trcka has already received letters of interest from a handful of schools with bowling programs, as close as Mount Mercy University and as far away as a college in New York state. She appreciates the long-distance interest, she says, but chances are she won't stray far from her home among the bowling Trckas.