

# Richards savors success at Riverton

State title fulfills season-long dream for Silverwolves' junior

By Jon Clifford

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Shelby Richards couldn't stop smiling if she tried.

The Riverton junior guard had just fulfilled a basketball dream, clutching the Class 5A championship trophy and one of the two game nets draped over her shoulders following the Silverwolves' victory against Layton on Saturday.

It was a moment she must have thought of a million times, but until recently, always saw herself doing it wearing a different jersey.

"Growing up as a Lady Miner, and seeing them play for state title, I always wanted to be here, always wanted to compete for a state titles," said Richards, who played at Bingham until last season.

That moment seemed unlikely, that smile a distant memory, about a year ago when Richards left the Bingham team, then left the school and checked into West Ridge Academy in West Jordan.

"She got some emotional issues straightened out and different things," said her father, Paul. "The counselors at West Ridge recommended she not go back to Bingham ... and I'd rather have a good, healthy adult daughter than a good



Shelby Richards looks for a teammate to pass the ball in a game against Fremont.

basketball player."

Added Shelby: "The switch was the greatest thing I could have done, just to be happy."

Richards focused on academics and healing in her almost eight months at the residential treatment center. She then transferred to Riverton two days in October.

Paul and Kim Richards appealed the Utah High School Activities Association's decision to deny Richards and her sister, Lateesha, their eligibility to play basketball this season. Shelby's decision was overturned, partly because of the rehab work she put in at West Ridge. But

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**ABOVE:** Shelby Richards played a big role in Riverton's success during her junior year.

**RIGHT:** Richards is greeted by her sister, Lateesha, during pregame introductions.



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Lateesha, also a junior guard, remained ineligible.

"It was hard," said Lateesha, who, like her sister, was adopted into the Richards' family as a young child. "But it was fun still supporting them and watching them do well."

Making a team that had won the Region 4 title a year earlier was not a given, but Shelby earned a spot in the back court. She made an immediate impact in her first game with the Silverwolves, scoring a game-high 16 points in a victory against Davis.

"She added above-average basketball skill and athleticism," Riverton coach Ron Ence said. "Certainly added to our depth so that we could play a few more players.

"I don't know the details about their problems in the past, but I just said whatever it was, let's put it behind us and start to have some good times. I felt like they both were respectful and bought into the team concept."

Though Lateesha wasn't cleared to play, she was able to practice with the team and sit on the bench in street clothes. Lateesha acted as the scout team point guard, which allowed her to bond with

teammates and maintain her basketball skills while also making her teammates better.

Shelby said having her sister, with whom she has played since age five and continues to be teammates with on the Salt Lakers travel team, at practice was vital to the team's success.

"I think if she wouldn't have been at practices every day working as a teammate, we probably wouldn't have taken state," said Shelby, who averaged about nine points per game this season. "I would have to guard her and stop her, and she would really push us."

That made it all too fitting Saturday when in the postgame bedlam, Shelby and Lateesha found each other, hugged and high-fived then posed for pictures with the trophy.

It was a family moment, something Shelby didn't think would be possible just a year earlier.

"I didn't switch schools so I could win games," she said. "I switched so I could be happy, play basketball and have fun. That's exactly how it was this season.

"It's amazing what can happen when you just have fun."