

Daughter of Lew-Port principal following in mom's shoes as sports star

✓ Softball standout Reyes Rodriguez making her mark on & around mound
 ✓ Tina (Williams) Rodriguez was Niagara Catholic's top basketball player of all time

BY JOSHUA MALONI
 GM/Managing Editor

Reyes Rodriguez is on a fast-track to sports success – which isn't surprising, considering her mom, Tina (Williams) Rodriguez, was the GOAT at Niagara Catholic High School.

Reyes just completed her second season of varsity softball for the Lewiston-Porter Lancers, posting a .469 batting average while pitching 73 innings and notching 48 strikeouts (including 11 "backwards Ks" – or "striking out looking").

What is astounding is that Reyes is only 13 years old, and finishing the eighth grade.

"She's always had 'it,'" Rodriguez said.

Now principal at Lewiston-Porter Intermediate Education Center, Rodriguez was a multi-sport star at Niagara Catholic, earning the title of greatest of all time when she broke the record for most career points scored by a basketball player (male or female) in the 1995-96 season.

With Reyes, Rodriguez said, "I see her leadership. From a very young age – almost 5 months – I could see she was already going to be independent. ... I call her a leader. I think that that really goes far in sports, because of the communication piece in it."

Rodriguez said her daughter's maturity has been paramount to early accomplishments.

"When she's going up against big schools, like Niagara Falls, Niagara Wheatfield, Ken West, NT – she's pitching against some of the best girls that are going D-1, or have the potential to go D-1. And she's challenging them; striking them out," Rodriguez said. "Some of them get hits, but naturally that's part of the game. But she holds her own. And I think that her competitiveness and her leadership and the maturity that she has, has gotten her to where she is right now."

"She works hard. She goes to pitching lessons, she goes to hitting lessons. Both of her coaches are awesome, and they see the potential, because they work with some of the greatest kids, too, around the area."

Speaking to Reyes it's clear that, despite her age, she carries herself like a seasoned professional.

When asked to describe herself, Reyes said, "I work for everything, and not just one thing, so that I'm able to do everything." And when the topic of teamwork is brought up, she offered, "The biggest thing I see is, when your teammates get along, and there's no drama, and everyone's happy, and everyone's a leader, you play so much better in the field. You are so much more bonded together. ... I want to be the teammate who brings everybody up, and who keeps the team happy."



Reyes Rodriguez is shown with her mother, Tina (Williams) Rodriguez, and on the mound. (Submitted photos)

With two years of varsity experience already on her resume, one might think softball comes easy to Reyes.

That isn't the case. "I definitely had to work very hard at it," she said. "When I played house, I was stuck in the outfield a lot in my first year, and I really wanted to be in the infield – and I really wanted to be a pitcher. So, I had to work really hard. And I was never that good at it. But my first year of travel, I went to a lot of pitching lessons, and I started working really hard; and that's where I am now."

That an infant Reyes reached for a baseball instead of a basketball, "breaks my heart still to this day," Rodriguez said, laughing. However, "The big thing, I think with her, is she has a heart for (softball). It's not that we have to tell her to do it. She wants to do it; she wants to play on any team that will pick her up. You have to have that drive and love for the sport to keep playing."

Reyes was named by her father, Thomas, in honor of former New York Mets ace shortstop José Reyes. She explained, "I kind of always loved playing (softball) with my parents. And I started house softball and our town rec leagues; and then my first year of travel, when I was 8, and I kind of just loved playing travel. I kept growing, getting better, and going on more lessons. My first year of travel, when I went to pitching lessons, is when I really fell in love

with the sport."

Finding success at a young age is something Rodriguez knows well. In a school like NC – where the total enrollment is just a few hundred – the best player becomes something of an in-house celebrity.

For Reyes, Rodriguez said, the key to staying grounded and enjoying the experience is balance.

"I definitely think it has to be fun," Rodriguez noted. "The social aspect of being a 13-year-old is important, as well. So, as a mom, I really understand that. And when she says, 'Mom, can I sleep at a friend's house?' or 'Can I go to this event?' I really have to make sure there's balance there. And although she might have a practice or a game, we have to say, 'OK, go to practice. I'll pick you up. You can go to the sleepover.' Because I don't want to take that away from her. You're only young once – she'll only be 13 once – and it's going by so fast."

"So, I think that's the important thing, and that was the one thing my parents taught me, was that you play hard, and then you can play. Put first things first, really, get your work done, and then you can go play."

"I think that's the biggest thing, is to have that balance."

Reyes said she's learned a lot from her mom.

"Definitely my biggest thing that she tells me is to just be a goldfish," Reyes said. "Forget about all the mistakes that you've made, and just move on from it; to be a good teammate; to be there for your team; to try your hardest; go 110% every single play; practice – you practice like you play. She's taught me everything like that, and that's what I'm so grateful for."

Reyes also plays varsity hockey and is a standout academic. She was awarded the Judgie Lytle '64 Scholarship at Nichols, which is given to students with "a capacity for excellence when inspired, an

enthusiastic athlete, and a loyal and sympathetic friend."

Rodriguez said, "Academically, she does very well. She just was inducted into the National Junior Honor Society. She's on high honors."

In the fall, Reyes will continue her softball career at the Nichols School in Buffalo. The infielder/pitcher said, "I've been wanting to go there for years now. Everyone tells me it's amazing."

"I toured it. It's a really nice atmosphere. Their sports are really good. And I wanted to push myself more."

BEST OF Savory Summer EATS & TREATS Get Your Votes In!!!

EACH MONTH, WE WILL BE GIVING AWAY A GIFT CERTIFICATE FROM AN AREA BUSINESS

From May 26 through July 28, vote for your favorite Summer Eats & Treats by filling out the entry blank below or visiting www.wnypapers.com. The winner of each category will be featured in the Niagara County Tribune/Sentinel and Island Dispatch.

When you cast a vote, you'll be entered to win a monthly prize.

Winners will be selected by random draw and notified by phone or email.

Visit www.wnypapers.com/savorysummer for a complete set of rules & to enter online.

NO PHOTOCOPIES WILL BE ACCEPTED

Categories

1. Best Summer Dining Spot _____
2. Best Frozen Treat _____
3. Best Beef on Weck _____
4. Best Hot Dog _____
5. Best Hamburger _____
6. Best BBQ (Ribs, Chicken, Pork) _____
7. Best Fries _____

Name (Full): _____
 Phone Number: _____
 Email: _____



DROP OFF OR MAIL TO:
Niagara Frontier Publications
 1859 Whitehaven Rd., Grand Island, NY, 14072
 or visit www.wnypapers.com/savorysummer

"Lori & Friends"



hosted by Lori Caso

LCTV Channel 1301

June 5th - June 18th

Mon 3am, 10am, 3pm • Wed 4am, 4pm, 10pm
 Thur 3am, 10pm • Fri 10:30am
 Sat 3:30am, 5:30pm • Sun 11:30am, 10pm



THE GRANITE SHOP

716-402-1046

A Milestone Video Production. Made possible by funds from...

NIAGARA FRONTIER PUBLICATIONS
 TRIBUNE/SENTINEL
 DISPATCH • PENNSYLVANIA
wnypapers.com

TOPS
 Friendly Markets

906 CENTER ST., LEWISTON

Shine Studio

Ask for Toni
 716-297-0181

The Youngstown Village Diner

425 Main St., Youngstown • 716-745-9858

~ WEEKLY SPECIALS ~

MON CLOSED

TUE 6AM-2PM - Spaghetti and Meatballs, Chicken Parm, Eggplant Parm, Penne Parm

WED 6AM-2PM - Meatloaf or Fish Fry: Battered-Breaded-Baked

THURS 6AM-2PM - Chicken Milanese or Fish Fry: Battered-Breaded-Baked

FRI 6AM-2PM - Haddock, Fish Sandwiches, Tuna Melts & New England Clam Chowder

SAT & SUN OPEN AT 6AM - Eggs Benedict, Banana Walnut Pancakes, Spinach & Feta Omelet & Our Full Breakfast & Lunch Menu

Home of the Press Box Salad