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Shelby Lee, 17, remembered as fierce competitor with big smile

Shelby Selina Lee, a standout wrestler who twice placed in a national girl's tournament, was killed in a car accident Dec. 28 near Maple Valley.

By Christine Clarridge

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Shelby Selina Lee weighed less than 115 pounds, but she could take down boys almost twice her size if she wanted.

The 17-year-old Seattle girl twice represented her club team in the girls' national wrestling tournament, placing in the finals both times.

Ms. Lee was a natural athlete, a fierce competitor and a perfectionist. But she was also a lively girl with a joyful smile and a willingness to forgive almost anything, her family said.

Ms. Lee was killed in a car accident near Maple Valley on Dec. 28.

Last week, more than 800 people gathered at the New Life Church in Renton to share memories and celebrate her life.

"Champions are people who challenge themselves and give 100 percent. In my opinion, Shelby was a champion," said Ruben Navejas, head coach of the Kent Cougars Wrestling Club. "Shelby was one of those people who was the best person she could be every day."

Shelby was in the front seat of her boyfriend's car when he lost control of the vehicle on a curve and crashed into a fire hydrant, police said. Her boyfriend and the two back-seat passengers survived with minimal injuries, according to Shelby's father, Dan Lee.

Spokesman Sgt. John Urquhart of the King County Sheriff's Office said that drugs and alcohol did not play a role in the collision, but excessive speed may have. No charges have been filed against the 18-year-old driver, but the investigation is ongoing.

Dan Lee and his wife, Carol Lee, did not want to discuss the accident. "He made a horrible mistake," Carol Lee said.

"But Shelby would not have wanted us to be mad at him," said her 15-year-old sister, Taylor Lee.

Taylor Lee, who was her sister's primary wrestling partner, placed first in the 2006 U.S. Girls' Wrestling Association national championship when Ms. Lee placed ninth. The girls wrestled with Takedown Express.

The Lees got their daughters involved in sports early and attended every meet, game, play and tournament. They sent them to private school when they were young and, when they were older, enrolled them in the Kent School District, where Ms. Lee wrestled for the Northwood Middle

School Jaguars and the Kentridge High School Chargers.

Ms. Lee loved her dog, Belle, and her green wrestling shoes, long showers and her cellphone. Her parents said she dreamed of being a cosmetologist.

"She was really good at doing hair and makeup," said her 19-year-old sister, Jamie Lee.

The family's greatest comfort has come from their faith and their church, her mother said.

"She loved Jesus and had a personal relationship with Christ," Carol Lee said.

"We cry because we miss her, but we know she is in heaven," Taylor Lee said.

Her father said he expects, though, that a new kind of grief will begin when they try to return to their normal routine.

Her coach said, "Every time I saw Shelby she gave me a big smile and a hug no matter what. It's one of those things you take for granted until you realize it's gone."

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