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Judge soccer star headed north

By Peter Richins
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Judge Memorial's Dani Griffin, one of the best goalkeepers to graduate from a Utah high school this year, had her pick of colleges.

Griffin took a recruiting visit to Oklahoma State, and was also interested in the Washington Huskies. A number of smaller schools also had shown interest in having her between the posts. But all of that came secondary to her academic interests.

"Academics to me is extremely important," Griffin said. "I looked at schools for that reason first."

And in the end, she chose the University of Wisconsin. Several relatives had attended school there, and she was attracted by the Badgers' school of business.

"It's one of the best in the country," Griffin said. She applied, was accepted, and began planning a college career without soccer.

Without warning, Badgers head coach Dean Duerst called her up and offered her a place on the team.

"It all kind of fell into place, so I said 'yes,'" Griffin said. "I feel extremely blessed and lucky; I couldn't have asked for any more. I'm going to the school of my dreams, and then the coach calls out of the blue and said he wanted me to sign." The offer was the second lucky break Griffin experienced in her soccer career over the last year. At the beginning of her senior year, Griffin decided to leave the Judge Memorial team during the winter/spring club season. She committed to Celtic Storm, and thought exposure on that organization's U-18 team would help her find a college scholarship.

Then, she found out Celtic Storm already had a strong goalkeeper, Park City's Alex Phillips. The Bulldogs and the Park City Miners have a long-standing rivalry in 3-A girls soccer.

"I didn't want to compete with my biggest rival for a starting spot," Griffin said. Then, she was contacted by the Utah Avalanche soccer club; oddly enough, Avalanche star and Park City forward Kelly Isleib tried to make the first contact, slipping her a phone number in the middle of a game between the high school teams.

"I thought it was a joke," Griffin said.

Eventually, Avalanche coach Joanna Barney phoned her at home and persuaded her to join the club. The U-18 Avalanche club team had won five consecutive State Cup championships, and had a roster full of D-I prospects. Barney said bringing Griffin on board was a great choice; without Griffin, she said, the Avalanche team could not have won their sixth consecutive state cup title last month.

"She's a natural talent," Barney said. "There's a lot of keepers out there that are trained talent, but whatever training she gets at the college level is just going to add to her ability because she has so much natural talent."

Griffin had won state championships with the Bulldogs her freshman and sophomore years, but winning a State Cup with the Avalanche was a whole new experience.

Just like the one awaiting her at Wisconsin.

Dani Griffin file

- * Judge Memorials' star goalkeeper for the girls' soccer team, Dani Griffin, will study business at the University of Wisconsin.
- * With no warning, coach Dean Duerst offered Griffin a spot on the Badgers' team.
- * Griffin also fell into her role as goalkeeper for the Utah Avalanche U-18 club team and won a State Cup championship in May.