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## SOCCER STAR FOLLOWS IN COACH'S FOOTSTEPS

July 23, 2019 | [Leave a comment](#)



Mali Mack plays a match against an opposing team in Oslo, Norway in August 2018 //Photo courtesy of Michele Mack

By Maya Anderson

Track & field and soccer star Mali Mack will be making waves at Western this January. She will be playing forward on the Western women's soccer team as a recent Meridian High School graduate.

Mack said major accomplishments she made in her time playing track & field and soccer included a 2018 1A All State honorable mention, first team selection in soccer and was the captain of her high school soccer team.

According to the Washington Interscholastic Activities Association, she also placed second in the 2018 state 100-meter dash, placed third this year and also holds her high school's record for the 100-meter dash with 12.39 seconds and the 200-meter dash with 25.78.

Western is also the alma mater of her high school coach, Paula French, who was inducted into the women's soccer hall of fame in 2005.

"She's fast," French said. "My god, she's fast."

French has played sports since grade school and first began coaching soccer in 1987 at Bellingham High School. French and Mack have been acquainted since Mack's eighth grade year when she assisted French in coaching on a Whatcom FC Rangers club soccer team.



Mack first got into sports from the influence of her two older sisters when she started playing soccer in kindergarten. In the first grade, she expanded to basketball until her first year of high school. She also took up softball and track & field during her first year.

"She was in all these different clubs," French said. "She worked part-time. She ran the scoreboards at games. She plays an instrument. She's in the band. I was like, what don't you do?"

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Portrait of Mali Mack in August 2018  
courtesy of Julie Harrell.

It was through basketball that Mali met her best friend, Libby Hielkema, a recent Lynden Christian High School graduate. The two had competed against each other on different teams.

"I heard that she was fast, a good athlete and a team player," Hielkema said.

It was only later that Mack and Hielkema participated in Rangers club soccer together and began to form a bond.

"Being able to play with Mali has been great," Hielkema said. "Spending three times a week together on the field is a really great bonding experience."

Hielkema will also be attending Western in the fall as a midfielder on the women's soccer team.

Instead of competing in both track & field and soccer this coming year, Mack decided to put her focus on soccer.

"It was a really hard decision," she said. "I chose soccer because it's such a great opportunity to play on such a high-level team that I couldn't pass that up."

Mack said an added bonus to attending Western is its proximity to home.

"I looked at other schools and I just felt like they were all too far away," she said. "I'm kind of a homebody."

She noted that she was excited to start a new soccer season at Western with a strong group of players and looks forward to playing on a competitive team. Mack and Hielkema are among the 11 new recruits for the 2019 season.

"I'm super proud of Mali," French said. "This kid can go after anything she wants because she has that internal motivation... On top of all of that, she's a great student... I'm really excited to see her development at the next level."

Mali currently works at the Birch Door Café and is trying to enjoy the free time she has before preseason matches begin. She plans to pursue a degree in education and also has an interest in event planning. The first preseason match is on Friday, Aug. 23 at Robert S. Harrington Field.

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