

Simpson gets military surprise on Senior Night



Louisburg senior Madisen Simpson hugs her brother, Technical Sgt. Greg Jeffery, after he surprised her during Senior Night ceremonies at Louisburg High School. Sgt. Jeffery, who is getting ready to go on a third tour of duty, will miss Madisen's graduation in May so he wanted to surprise her during her special night.

Tears filled Madisen Simpson's eyes to the point she could barely see.

During her senior night ceremony, Madisen looked to her left and saw a man dressed in military fatigues walking toward her. It couldn't have been the person she thought it was – he wasn't supposed to be there.

"It felt like a dream," Madisen said.

It had already been an emotional day for the Louisburg High School senior. Earlier in the day Friday, Simpson fulfilled a lifelong goal when she signed to play college basketball and shed tears of joy.

Then came her final home game, and as she was subbed out for the last time, she couldn't fight back the tears as she gave a hug to her coach Shawn Lowry and the rest of her teammates. There would be no more playing basketball on the LHS court.

More waterworks came as she walked out with her parents Darrin and Joan Simpson during Senior Night ceremonies, but there was a void. Someone special was supposed to be there.

Madisen's brother Greg Jeffery, a technical sergeant in the United States Air Force, hasn't been able to watch any of her games during her senior season and he told her he couldn't make her senior night due to training.

Sgt. Jeffery is also unable to attend her graduation in May as he is being deployed for his third tour of duty as an Air Force medic. So Madisen wasn't sure when she would see him again.

She really wished her big brother was there to share in her special moment

As it turned out – her wish came true.

The public address announcer, Damon Dennis, announced to the crowd, "We have a special message tonight sent from Madisen's brother, Technical Sergeant Greg Jeffery, who is a United States Air Force medic currently stationed at Offutt Air Force Base in Nebraska. Her brother wished that he could be here tonight..."

Then a long pause.

"And he is," Dennis finished.

Technical Sgt. Jeffrey walked out to a standing ovation and Madisen raced over to her brother for a long hug.



Madisen Simpson tried to fight back the tears as she raced toward her brother Greg.

“When they said they had a message from my brother, I just backed up because I broke down and I couldn’t help it,” Madisen said. “My parents actually thought I was just going to start walking out the door but I had no idea he was there. Then when Doc (Dennis) did that pause, I just kept thinking, is that it? Then when he said he was here, I just lost it. You watch those videos online where they come and surprise people and I never thought that would happen to me. It was a great surprise.”

It was a surprise that was planned out almost two months in advance when Darrin and his son were sitting out in the garage one night talking. Darrin ran the idea past Greg and he thought it would be a good idea.

“To be honest, Greg isn’t one that really likes the spotlight

very much, so I wasn't sure if he would want to do it," Darrin said. "But he thought it would be a great surprise for her so we started planning it out."

Darrin went to LHS assistant principal Darin Gagnebin and then ran it by Lowry to make sure everyone was on board with the idea.

Once they got the clearance, the two had to make Madisen as least suspicious as possible – and to do so they had to hurt her feelings a little bit.

Greg and his family had originally planned to attend Madisen's senior night game, but a week before, he sent out a group text message that told everyone his training had been moved and he wouldn't be able to make it.

"When Madisen got that she was pretty bummed – really bummed actually," Darrin said. "She is really pretty close to her brother and they have a special bond. We knew this would be a great surprise for her though, so we stuck it out."

Then came the moment as Greg watched his little sister run toward him with tears streaming down her face.

"It was pretty cool," he said. "I didn't get to see her reaction right away after the announcement, but I went back and looked at the video and it was pretty special."

"As we were walking out, I was thinking I should have put some Kleenexes in my pocket, but it was too late by that point. It was a pretty special moment for sure."



Darrin Simpson, Sgt. Greg Jeffery, Madisen Simpson and Joan Simpson share a family hug following the military surprise Friday at Louisburg High School.

Greg, who is a 2003 Louisburg High School graduate, has completed two tours of duty in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and will leave for his third tour shortly.

Friday was a special moment he, and the rest of his family, won't be able to forget when they are apart for six months.

"We obviously would like to see them more than we do, but once they get that occasional weekend off, we try and make it work," Madisen said. "We saw them on New Year's, but I didn't think we would be able to see him until after his deployment.

"It is a little rough. It is hard knowing that he is gone half a year and that his wife and his kids miss him. We all miss him. With us, we try to stay in contact as much as possible.

Once he gets home though, it is alright again."