

6 SPORTS

Volleyball veterans reflect on 4 years of play

Seniors explain leadership, team chemistry, first years of program, as group heads into playoffs

Allison Gully
News Editor

As the school's volleyball team enters the playoffs and the seniors take the court as the leaders of the team, they look back to the program's first years and how the group has evolved.

"I wish we could have recorded our very first practice ever," senior Rachel Key said. "Coach Gould says that all the time. We couldn't even pass to each other."

Four years ago it was announced that the school would be adding volleyball to its list of athletic teams. This was a whole new sport for many of the players, but the athletes didn't back away from the challenge.

"We didn't know what we were doing, it was so different from anything else we had played," senior Taylor Hoelscher said. "Somebody would throw the ball to us and we would catch it like a basketball."

Most of the girls who decided to play started from scratch. They had to learn the very basic skills and the rotation, along with everything else in volleyball.

"I didn't even know how

to hold my hands," senior Macy Gully said. "I was like what is this?"

Senior Tara Weber jumped on the idea of a new athletic competition.

"I loved volleyball from the start," Weber said. "Taylor [Hoelscher] didn't want to play at first, but over the summer we played with each other and she figured out she was pretty good at it."

The first step in building the volleyball program was summer league. This is where players learned the rules in a low pressure environment and put their new found skills to the test.

"As summer league went on you just started to know and learn," Key said. "I remember a ball came over the net where I could've slammed it down, well I didn't know that. I just watched it fall and Coach Gould was like, 'you can hit the ball.'"

The team has moved from freeballs, when the ball goes over the net with a pass instead of a hit, to making complex plays.

"When we were first learning volleyball it was so sloppy," senior Abby Eubank said. "Like the drills we do, we do over and over on a daily practice. When we first started out it was all about learning how to do the drills, now we can just do it. It's habit."



Weber



Junior Emmy Phillips gives sophomore Landry Oliver a celebratory hug after the team defeated Sonora Saturday to claim the first place seat in the District. "It was an exciting game," Phillips said. "After we won it felt like a path was open for the rest of the playoffs."

One of the main drills is called perpetual passing. The players rotate from serving and passing, and each pass is scored on a scale of one to three, depending on how close the ball gets to the designated target.

"I remember our goal the first time we ever did perpetual was 60 points in five minutes," Weber said. "Now we're up to 230 in five minutes. We've definitely improved."

After one year of a junior varsity team, the team moved up to the big leagues and entered the world of varsity volleyball as a second year program.

"It put us up to the challenge," Weber said. "We lost so many games and it was frustrating but once we started winning it all got better. It helped us, playing harder teams like that."

Even though wins were hard to come by, the team grew better with each game.

"Seeing how other teams played, it made us better," Gully said. "Watching Central play gave us ideas, like that's what it's supposed to look like. We want to

get there."

These tough games early on show the vast improvements that have been made over the years.

"Everyone has gotten smarter," senior Kriss Kellermier said. "The defense specialists are smarter with their passes, and the setters are better with their sets and where to take the ball. Hitters have learned the best place to put the ball down."

This year's volleyball program has nine seniors playing, more than any other previous year.

"Being together so long has made us ready for this season," Gully said. "There's a lot of team chemistry and we feel like we're all capable of going to regionals."

With such a diverse group, the seniors lead from different areas across the board.

"We all share the leadership," Weber said. "If one of us is having an off game, one of us can step up and do better and keep the team going. The juniors help too, they're leaders as well."

Energy is everything with volleyball, the seniors keep that their focus.

"We just really try to build each other up and be encouraging," Eubank said. "We

never are getting made at each other, we aren't that team."

Nerves can hinder the team, listening to music before and just being with each other helps the group remain calm and concentrate for the game ahead.

"Whenever we're nervous it's like you don't want to make mistake," Hoelscher said. "You don't want to touch the ball."

The team explains that even though their biggest strength is being encouraging and communicating, they can have some problems finishing.

"When we're at 24 points we can't finish our one point, ever," Hoelscher said. "It's always the next one. I don't think we've ever gotten our 25th point on our first try."

The team has bright prospects though as the season continues and they finish district as co-district champions.

"Our first goal is regionals and the second is definitely state," Gully said.

Gully also explains how some things never change.

"Our fun level hasn't changed at all through the years, we still have so much fun," Gully said. "The game hasn't gotten old at all. I could play forever I feel like."



Varsity team members huddle together during a timeout. "In the huddles, we encourage each other and bring each other up because we tend to get down when we make mistakes," senior Taylor Hoelscher said. "It's all about unity."



Gully