

# FOR THE LOVE OF VOLLEYBALL: Sellers, Whittenburg catch bug for sport at early age

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**EDWARDSVILLE** - Teammates **Max Sellers** and **Josh Whittenburg** of Edwardsville spent the summer playing the sport they love: volleyball.

The young men will be playing volleyball on the Edwardsville High School boys team this spring.

The two trained to play in two national tournaments in one month over the summer. Sellers, a libero, and Whittenburg, an outside hitter, played with their club team High Performance St. Louis 14 Royal in the USA Volleyball Boys' Junior National Championships in Dallas from June 30 to July 3. Their team competed against squads from Northern and Southern California, Florida and Wisconsin. They finished in 17th place.

Sellers and Whittenburg traveled to Bradford Beach in Milwaukee, Wisc., July 21-22 to play in the USA Volleyball Junior Beach Tour National Championships. They trained with **Joe Diemeke**, the director of Outdoor Volleyball for High Performance. Prior to the tournament, they set a goal to finish in the top 10, a challenge because the nationals tournament would also be their debut as a beach team. The weather was perfect on the shores of Lake Michigan as they played against teams from Chicago, Ohio, Virginia, Texas and Wisconsin. Sellers and Whittenburg met their goal by finishing 9th and receiving a bronze medal in the silver bracket.

Sellers said he hopes to play volleyball on a college scholarship when he gets older.

“Volleyball is by far my favorite sport,” he said. “I really like the teamwork aspect of it. In volleyball if you get the ball on your side of the court you really have to communicate.”

Whittenburg said he believes volleyball is starting to develop across the country and here at home for both girls and boys.

“I like playing both indoors and outdoors,” he said. “I prefer playing indoors. It will be nice to play with Max on the Edwardsville High School team this spring after playing club volleyball with him.”

Sellers and Whittenburg began playing volleyball in the grade school camp run by **EHS Head Coach Andrew Bersett**. They played at the YMCA program run by **Nate Tingley** and in the Glen Ed Volleyball program run by **Brenda and Doug Saye**. When Bersett formed a High Performance Illinois 14U team, Sellers and Whittenburg tried out and played; they were 11. They also played for Bersett at **Liberty Middle School**. Liberty was 7-1 this past fall.

This summer, Whittenburg attended Bersett’s camp and worked with EHS alumni, **Eric Fitterer and John Pranger** who played college volleyball. Fitterer played for Lewis University in the 2015 National Championships and now plays professionally in Europe. Pranger played for Quincy University and was an assistant coach at McKendree University this spring. While Whittenburg was at Bersett’s camp, Sellers attended a USA Volleyball Camp in Vernon Hills, Ill.

During the Indoor Nationals Tournament in Dallas, the two boys and their families shared a hotel with the Olympic National teams from the USA, Australia, Bulgaria and Russia. The men’s national teams were there for a tournament prior to going to Rio for the Olympics. The boys attended the USA vs. Australia game on July 2. Sellers and Whittenburg got photos with and autographs from members of the USA Olympic team, which was a thrill. They even played “sitting” volleyball with members of the USA Men’s Paralympic team.

The two boys couldn’t say enough for Coach Bersett and the coaches at Liberty Middle School and at Edwardsville High School for their devotion to the sport.

With these two coming up and other talented boys already performing on a national stage, the future of Edwardsville High School volleyball looks bright.