

Risavy helps establish Metro-East's volleyball program, new program in upcoming collegiate career

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
April 4 2017 8:18 AM



EDWARDSVILLE – A.J. Risavy knows what it's like to be on the ground floor of a volleyball program.

Metro East Lutheran started playing boys volleyball in Risavy's freshman year of 2013-14. "It was a really cool experience to start only with freshmen and sophomores my first year here," Risavy said.

The MEL senior is now going to get the opportunity to help establish a collegiate volleyball program, signing a letter of intent Monday to play at Lincoln Memorial University in Harrowgate, Tenn., beginning this fall. The Railsplitters, an NCAA Division II program, launched a men's volleyball program this season, with play beginning in January; they're members of the South Athletic Conference for most sports, but men's volleyball is a member of Conference Carolinas for the sport.

"Definitely academics" is what attracted Risavy to LMU. "They have a major that I'm going to go into – I'm going to go into accounting – and they have a pretty good school of business; the campus was really nice. I liked all the guys on the team; it was just a pretty good atmosphere."

The campus is located next to Tennessee's Cumberland Gap National Historic Park, which provides a very scenic locale. "It was a very scenic area. It was very beautiful."

The fact that LMU's men's volleyball program is in its initial stages also attracted Risavy to the Railsplitters. "Coach (Dan) Danis wanted a tall setter coming in," Risavy said, "and hopefully I'm going to be able to fill that role. They're a first-year program and they're doing well for a first-year program; I'm pretty excited."

Risavy began playing volleyball while he was in middle school, at Trinity Lutheran in Edwardsville. "I started playing with a small Glen-Ed team, then played in middle school in my eighth-grade year, then started playing club (currently with High Performance of St. Louis) and high school – it just kind of developed from there.

"From middle school, I didn't have a lot of skill; I was just a setter and a role player, but starting in high school, I really started developing as a setter – through club and high school with (MEL coach Jason) Batty, I was able to develop my skills a lot more."

"I'm extremely excited for A.J.," Batty said. "We've grown all four years together here; I started the program four years ago and to watch him grow from freshman all the way up to senior, it's been remarkable – it's been a blessing. Just to see him from freshman year to senior year to where he pretty much runs it our on the court, he has full control and he's telling people what to run; he's like having another coach out on that court – it's been awesome to have him.

"His volleyball IQ is very high."

That Risavy has improved as a player has shown on the floor. “What I've noticed a lot from the beginning to now,” Batty said, “is the choice of who he's setting. Before, he would choose and 'ah, I don't know if I would set him' to where we're pretty much thinking the same exact thing – he's setting the person I would set, thing like that.”

Risavy's size – he's 6-7 – gives him several options when the Knights are on the offensive end of play. “Running a 5-1 (offense), with him being so tall and an excellent hitter and him being a left-handed hitter playing the right side – he's like the perfect setter because he's tall, he plays the right side and he's a lefty. To have all those three things has been awesome.”

Risavy's ability to find sets in play has helped him improve his overall game, he feels. “Just like my ability to locate sets better and being able to run an offense more effectively,” Risavy said about his improvements. “I didn't really have an idea of what I was actually supposed to do what a setter should do, like trying to put hitters in the best situation against the block; I didn't really start doing that until high school. That's what I've primarily developed in my later years of playing volleyball.”

The opportunity to help establish the LMU men's program is especially attractive to Risavy. “There's definitely a bunch of great guys there already,” Risavy said, “so I get come in and develop with them; I'm looking forward to it. I'm just hoping to get better as a player and then try to develop a role starting in the first couple of years and if not, just trying to help the team in whatever way I can.”