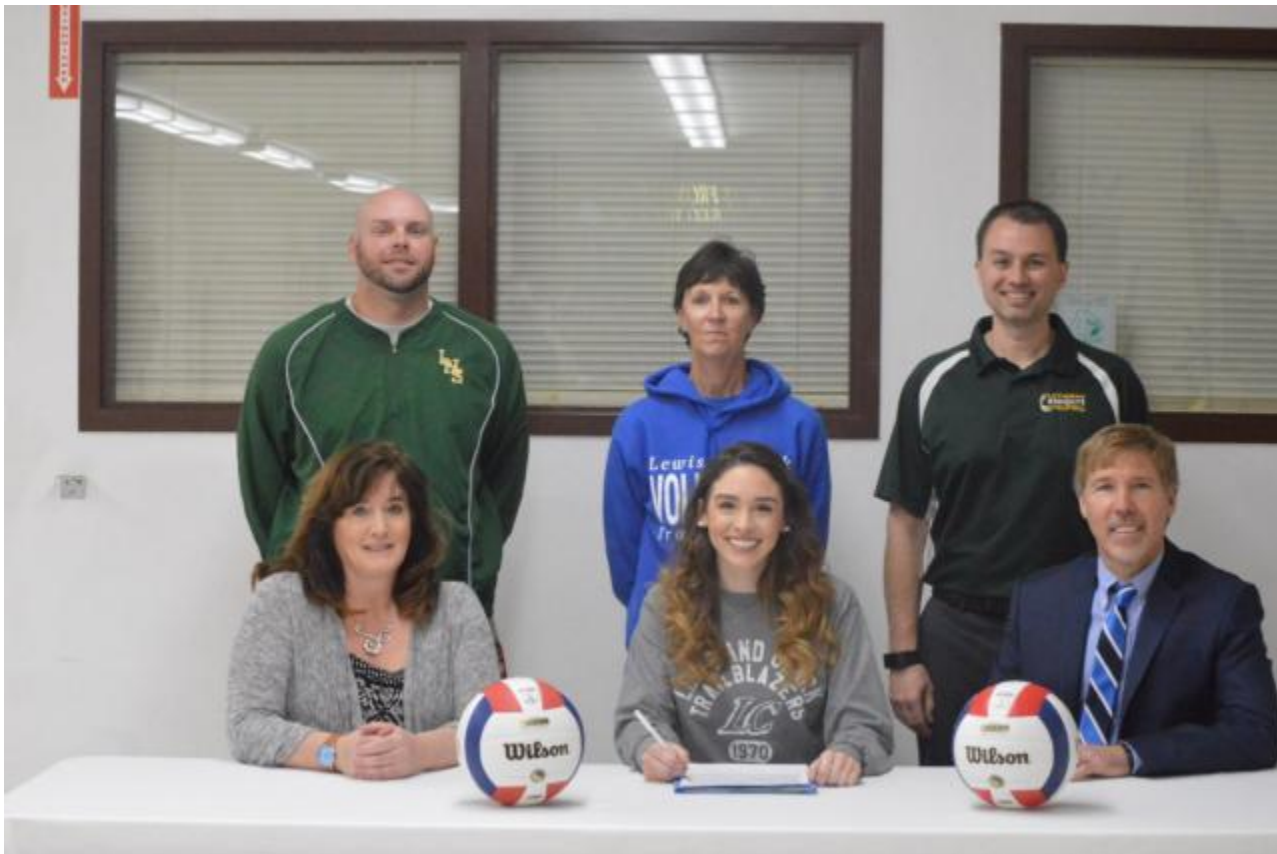


MELHS' Flaherty signs letter of intent to join LCCC women's volleyball team

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE – One of the greatest girls volleyball players in Metro East Lutheran's history is heading to the next level.

Lydia Flaherty will be staying home for the next two volleyball seasons, signing a letter of intent to join Lewis and Clark Community College's women's volleyball team in a ceremony at MEL Wednesday morning.

“Probably the team most of all,” Flaherty said about what memories she will take from playing in the MEL program the last four years. “I mean, I had a great team and it was just an awesome experience being able to be here.”

Flaherty played the setter position with the Knights and compiled an impressive record over the years. Flaherty owns five of the top-10 single-match assist totals, including a record 39 in one match, and two of the top six single-season marks in assists and serving percentage; she's also third in total career assists with 1,391 and third in career service percentage (96.9 percent) and helped the Knights to two IHSA Class 1A regional titles in her years on the MEL varsity.

“I feel like I progressed as a setter because I went from playing a 5-2 (offense) to 5-1 my last two years, so being on the court full-time setting – it added a lot of responsibility.”

“(Flaherty) has been one of the more accomplished volleyball players we've had in our school's history,” said Knight coach Jon Giordano. “She's always been a good athlete and that has helped her, but she's always worked super-hard at everything in practice; she has a great feel for getting the ball to whoever was hitting well in matches.

“What I was most proud of is how much of a leader she became during the course of her time here at Lutheran High; she really stepped up especially this year to kind of take charge of the team – never in an abrasive way, but always in an encouraging way. It was a real source of strength to the rest of our team.”

Setter isn't the easiest position to play on a volleyball team. “It's a very difficult position,” Giordano said. “You can never make everyone happy all the time, but I think she had a great ability to make people at ease around her and to make them feel comfortable on the court.”

First-year Trailblazer coach Johnna Kinney is excited about having Flaherty's services next season. “She came in and is really getting along well with the other girls (in open-gym sessions),” Kinney said. “They love her court presence and the way she's working with her hitters.”

“Definitely the team going to the open gyms,” Flaherty said about what attracted her to the Trailblazer program. “I'm definitely enjoying all the girls and the nursing program especially; I'm looking into majoring in nursing and I know they have a great (nursing program) out there, so that's definitely a plus.”

Staying home to play at the college level is also a plus for Flaherty. “I get to stay at home only 10 minutes from Lewis and Clark,” Flaherty said. “It's super-nice (getting to play at the college level right away); I just want to play and I love the game, so it's a perfect fit.”

Flaherty began playing volleyball in third grade. “Back in third grade, we didn't have a very big school; we had a school of about 40 kids, so there weren't very many girls going out for volleyball,” Flaherty recalled. “I had the chance to start young and I've enjoyed it ever since.”

Flaherty also was a member of the MEL girls track team while at the school, qualifying for the IHSA Class 1A state girls track meet in the high jump in 2016. “I did the 400 (meters), 4x400 (relay) and the 100 (meters, in addition to high jumping),” Flaherty said.

“I think this will be a nice fit for her,” Giordano said. “She certainly walks out of her with a lot of accolades; she's third in career assists for our school, she has five of the top 10 single-match performances for assists, she leaves as the third-highest career serving percentage (marks), which is absolutely amazing.

“I'm excited that she's closer to home so that we'll be able to cheer her on at the college level also.”