

Alton High volleyball girls make impossible possible in 25-win season

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The Alton High varsity volleyball players include as pictured: front row - Savannah Fisher (sophomore), Shannon Farrell (senior), Rachael Bridges (senior), Olivia Cauley (junior), Jordan Nolan (senior); second row - Megan Paulda (senior), Kailin Haug (junior), Jada Green (junior), Rachel Cauley (senior).

With any successful high school athletic program, talent is of course a necessity, but almost as much if not more than that, there needs to be strong sense of pride.

This season, the Alton High School volleyball team has already won 25 matches and has made the coaches, players, parents and entire community proud of them.

“This has been a record-breaking season that has definitely created a stronger sense of pride and interest to the program,” Alton volleyball coach Stacey Ferguson said. “I have several returning varsity girls that have worked hard to get where we are. We were able to push wins throughout the season because of the hard work from all the players. We are not a team that relies on one or two players.”

The Alton High coach said the Lady Redbirds have entered the tough part of their season. Edwardsville, 16-11 overall, defeated Alton 25-23 and 25-16 on Thursday night at Edwardsville. O’Fallon defeated Alton 25-16 and 25-14 on Tuesday night. On Thursday, Oct. 23, Alton faces Belleville West, another difficult opponent.

When the season started, Alton had a handful of returning starters, but the extra year of experience made them feel more comfortable and the overall chemistry with her girls has been great, Ferguson said.

“I think when I look at them night after night, it is hard to pick just one person that stands out,” she said. “It has been that kind of season. It has been a total effort on everybody’s part. Everybody is producing offensively and defensively and picks up each other when someone gets down. All of them are contributing and bringing their game.”

Jordan Nolan, a senior setter, has played on the varsity team since her freshman year. Megan Paulda, an outside hitter, also has played on varsity since she was a freshman. Jada Green and Rachel Cauley both had varsity experience last year. Middle hitter Savannah Fisher and Kailin Haug have blended well with the others. Other senior contributors are Shannon Ferrell and Rachel Bridges and junior Olivia Cauley.

Before the season started, Ferguson didn’t have the expectations of winning this many matches.

“I knew we would be better than last year,” she said. “We had some chemistry issues last year and the girls didn’t mesh as well on the court. I knew after seeing the girls this summer that they enjoyed their time in the gym and wanted to be around each other. That makes my job easier.”

In Thursday’s Edwardsville match, Nolan had 15 assists; Paulda had five kills, one block and six digs; Haug had four kills; and Olivia Cauley had six digs. In the O’Fallon match, Nolan had 10 assists and three kills. Green had five kills; Haug had five service points; and Paulda nine digs.

Coach Ferguson said her girls are not just volleyball players, but outstanding athletes and students overall.

“A few of the girls play multiple sports,” she said. “Jordan Nolan is No. 7 in her class. The kids excel both academically and athletically. It has been a great season for me as a coach. These girls have responded well to me.”

Nolan broke the Alton High volleyball record for assists and Green leads the team in kills and is approaching a school record in that category.

This season the excitement has just kept building with a pair of tournament victories and a 16-1 record to start the season that moved to 19-1.

Alton’s girls will be paired up against Springfield High School to start the Edwardsville Regional, then ultimately will likely meet Edwardsville again with a win.

Ferguson said her group has to pull through and work hard to make it work through the rest of the season.

“The team approach and chemistry has been very good,” she said. “We have had our moments, but the girls found ways to pull it back together. The next goal for the girls is making it through the regional. Whether or not we reach the rest of the goals this season, the girls have determination and enthusiasm to make what seems impossible, possible.”