BEA standout's play gets better and better

Late in the first game of a match against Bellefonte last week, Bald Eagle Area junior Danielle Reese cocked back her right arm and took a big tip at the volleyball.

Instead of a powerful rocket down to the floor on the other side of the net, the ball caught the tape and rolled nearly the entire length before dropping on the other side, just inside the sideline for a point.

The Lady Eagle junior turned to her teammates and gave a sheepish laugh, like she got away with something a little cheap.

It was unintentional, of course, but with the way this season has gone for Reese, it was not like most of the points you would expect to be emanating from her right hand.

For someone who took up the sport for the first time as a freshman, Reese has got the goods.

"I trust her, I go to her a lot," senior setter Ashley Hamilton said, pointing at the two sidelines. "I will go from that line over there and push it to this line. I will force her to do that."

When asked what he does to prepare his team defensively when facing Reese, Bellefonte coach Chad Weight had a rather succinct answer: "Pray."

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Bald Eagle Area's Reese getting better and better

Bald Eagle Area junior Danielle Reese is just 38 kills short of the Lady Eagles' career record of 745 kills heading into tonight's clash against Philipsburg-Osceola.

CDT photo/Christopher Weddle

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Reese, who is also the team's most accurate passer, has 388 kills so far this season, just 60 shy of Angela Hoover's school record from five years ago, and her 707 career kills is just 38 short of Lindsay Confer's mark set last year.

The success has already started to win her attention from college coaches. She has heard from scores of Division II and III programs, but she probably could even cut it at a small Division I school. Reese knows her favorite sport can take her places and she would like to be challenged at the next level.

First-year BEA coach Chad Campbell, who also coaches the Lions Pride club program in State College, knew he had a gem when he took over the Lady Eagle program after moving over from Bellefonte.

"Dani was a real nice player last year and did a nice job with the Lions Pride crew," Campbell said. "But she's really stepped forward. She's gone from being a nice player to being a dominant player. She was very good before. She was the second option on a quality team last year ... and it's always to see what happens to a player when that big superstar leaves."

Confer was definitely a top-notch player, earning all-state honors before heading on to Kutztown, where she is already having an impact.

Now Reese is taking over as the lead Eagle, and her teammates certainly depend heavily on her. On key points, pretty much everyone in the building knows where the next set is heading, and Reese is just fine with that.

"I like the team depending on me sometimes," she said. "I feel like I should be there for my team and I should get us out of trouble if I have to."

Now, the 5-foot-11, broad-shouldered Reese needs to figure out how to harness that power and use it a little more judiciously. Campbell would like to see her throttle back now and then and not try to bounce the ball to the ceiling as often. Sometimes, a roll shot or tip over a blocker, or angling the ball off the blocker, can terminate a point better than hitting it 100 mph.

But she is definitely learning — quickly.

"It doesn't help that the kid can hit the ball over the top of you," Weight said. "And she's got all kinds of shots, too. She can be creative."

Campbell also would like to see the sets spread around a little bit more to teammates, and it will be a point of emphasis next fall when only Hamilton and a couple backrow players will have graduated. Reese is hitting .292 this season, which is quite respectable, but Campbell also figures she is taking close to 40 percent of the team's swings. If they can cut her back to 25 percent, while upping her hitting percentage to close to .360, then she would be far more effective.

Campbell said there has been little jealousy over the work and attention Reese gets, although Hamilton admitted there has been the occasional comment.

"We're all girls and they're like, 'Oh, her name's in the paper,'" Hamilton said. "But it's true. She's our go-to player."

Quite possibly the epitome of how much she carries BEA came in the team's five-game win against Philipsburg-Osceola a few weeks ago. She had 25 kills in that win over their rivals off a ton of swings.

The schools play a rematch tonight in Philipsburg, with each sporting 1-3 Mountain League records.

Reese is looking forward to the match and the future — and so are the rest of the Lady Eagles.

"Coming into the season I wasn't sure how we could be," Reese said. "But now I have a lot of confidence in our team."

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