

Girls volleyball

Impressive journeys for Hersey's Olhava, Stedman

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Coach Nancy Lill has really enjoyed seeing how far Gabrielle Olhava and Courtney Stedman have come in their volleyball careers at Hersey.

The senior standouts have also gone far away.

"They went to Italy together in the summer of 2013 with Gabri's family," Lill said. "They are very close friends."

The close friends return for their final season at Hersey, both coming off all-area campaigns in which they helped lead the Huskies to an 11th straight

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Mid-Suburban League East crown. "I knew both girls had tremendous potential when they joined our program," said Lill, one of the winningest coaches in the state with more than 820 wins. "They've worked hard to become the great players they are today."

Stedman joined the varsity as a freshman while Olhava got the call as a sophomore.

The versatile Stedman does it all for Hersey. She put down 95 kills along with collecting 352 assists, 114 digs and 21 blocks last fall.

She began as a varsity backup outside hitter while developing her setting skills on the junior varsity.

As a sophomore, Stedman played outside hitter since Northern Florida sophomore Abby Fesl was running a 5-1.

Last year, the Huskies ran a 6-2 with Stedman. Olhava was a primary hitter on the outside and right side as well as our primary setter. "Courtney is a talented all-around player, who is a smart player capable of putting the ball away in the front row," Lill said. "Her setting has even gotten better this past



Hersey volleyball players Gabrielle Olhava, left, and Courtney Stedman, right, gather for a pregame cheer before Monday's game against Libertyville in the Ken Carter Gymnasium.

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off-season, and I am confident she will be playing in college next year."

Olhava has already announced her college plans: she has made a verbal commitment to Division I New Hampshire.

Olhava stepped into a starting middle blocker roll as a sophomore.

"She has always been an explosive hitter with a very quick arm swing," Lill said. "Gabri has also developed into an outstanding blocker as well. Opposing hitters have a difficult time getting it past her block."

Olhava led Hersey in block kills with 85 last year and was second in kills with 160, while leading the team in hitting efficiency with a .309 percentage.

"Gabri has developed her all around game and could even possibly be seeing some time in the back row this season," Lill said "I am excited for Gabri to be competing next fall at the Division I level. UNH is lucky to have her."

Here is a closer look at the two seniors.

Gabrielle Olhava: She stated playing the game when she tried out for her middle school team in seventh grade.

"My friends and I wanted to try something new and thought it would be a fun experience," Olhava said. "My older cousin played in high school and I went to her games all the time and remember thinking "I want to be just like those girls."

Olhava has accomplished that goal and will continue with it at New Hampshire.

"Volleyball is all about having fun and I'm lucky to be continuing my love for the game in the future," said Olhava,

Olhava wouldn't want to experience it with any other group.

"I really love spending time with the team," she said. "It's pretty cool to have 12 best friends. It's also the best feeling looking out and seeing bleachers filled with fans. Getting that block or kill and having the viewers cheer for you is an indescribable feeling. All the coaches make going to practice really enjoyable for everyone."

Courtney Stedman: Stedman's first passion was softball but once she started to follow in her sister's volleyball footsteps, she had a new love at the age of 9.

"My sister played and it looked like a lot of fun so I decided to give it a try," said Stedman, who began playing in the Arlington Heights League. "I was bored with softball and liked the faster pace of volleyball. You are always interacting with your teammates."

Courtney even wears No. 21 because that's the number her sister wore when she played volleyball for Lill.

"Coach Lill has been a huge influence and gives me the confidence to play my best," Stedman added "She has supported me in being a versatile player, which allows me to do basically everything on the court."

Stedman enjoys working with people so she said she wants to major in either special education or the medical field. She participates in the Service Over Self club at Hersey and owns a 4.3 GPA.

"I love to help others and hopefully make a difference in our community," Stedman said.

Stedman says Olhava is always there to help.

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