NEW TRIER

STEPPING UP

Shafiq takes on added responsibilities during her senior season

BY ERIC VAN DER,
For Sun-Times Media, @VanDERsports

WINNETKA — The New Trier girls volleyball team had five libraries, counting on its roster a year ago, but just one — middle hitter Sarah Shafiq — wasn't a senior in 2013.

As one of only three seniors on this year's team and the Trevians' best player, Shafiq is being asked to do more this season. The 6-0 Shafiq, who has verbally committed to California, is not only the team's go-to option on offense and the squad's best blocker, she also is more of a leader this season on a very inexperienced squad.

Moreover, Shafiq is on the court for a greater amount of time this year as she's now serving and then playing defense for one rotation.

"I get to serve this year and then play defense, so that's obviously something I'm working on," Shafiq said. "Being tall, it's harder to get lower, but we have an awesome back row, so I rely on them to help me out."

Senior Courtney Lewis has been especially helpful, Shafiq said, digging every point. Lewis remains 10-ably backed by junior libero Kate Pilon, who's also playing in the back row because it allows players to get under the ball and flip it. It sounds simple, but it's difficult for somebody who's Shafiq's height.

"It's pretty hard," Shafiq said. "But you have to keep saying it to yourself and eventually it'll just become habit."

Shafiq's blocking is something New Trier coach Hannah Hatch said the Trevians will rely upon this year, and so too is her leadership after the graduation of Taylor Tashima (Northwestern), Haley Stansberry (Virginia), M.C. Morgan (Holy Cross) and Emmy Friedler (Pennsylvania).

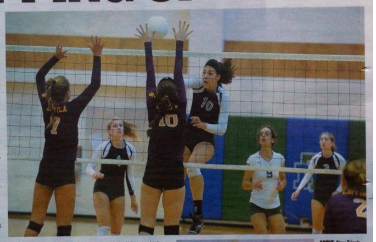
"I think she's one that leads more by example, in terms of just being there, working hard, trying to include all of the girls in everything and giving other girls opportunities to step up, too, in terms of trading different things on the court and in practice," Hatch said. "I don't think she's the one necessarily taking charge and stepping up to [pump up and motivate] the team. She's much more, 'This is what we need to do.' I think she's calm, and that's actually something we need on this team."

Shafiq's biggest strengths remain her blocking, height and ability to put the ball away when she's set. New Trier struggled with its consistency at times en route to a sixth-place finish at its Sumner's End Tournament on Saturday, but Shafiq was clearly its No. 1 option in big moments like in its match Saturday against Glenbrook North.

The match's momentum seemed to turn in the Spartans' favor after a time in the second game, but Shafiq came up with two big kills — the first was emphatically straight down to make it 24-17 New Trier, and the second came on a slide to make it 25-22 New Trier — to help the Trevians win 25-17, 25-22.

It was clear how much of a force Shafiq can be on those points, but one question looms: How well can the young, developing Trevians pass and set in order to get her the ball?

"Definitely we look to her for leadership and for big support and credit against whomever we can," Hatch said. "We just need to be able to get the ball to her."



ABOVE: New Trier's Sarah Shafiq goes for the kill against Lincoln-Way's Mara Zulat (7) and Kate Pilon (16) on Saturday at New Trier's Sumner's End Tourna-ment. | TRACY ALLOTTA/SUN-TIMES MEDIA

LEFT: New Trier's Sarah Shafiq (left) and Nicole Dihanovich (center) attempt to block a tip by Lincoln's Jolie Murphy on Saturday. | TRACY ALLOTTA/SUN-TIMES MEDIA