

Sports

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Slammers rule area volleyball squad

By Chris McCosky
staff writer

IT SHOULD surprise no one that eight of the nine players selected to the 1986 All-Area volleyball team are hitters.

Observerland, in a relatively short span of time, has become a haven for powerful spikers. Last year, the All-Area team featured Lisa Bokovec, Caroline Smith and Sue Cyrus. Two years ago, Nancy Rzepka, Jill Waterman and Amy Austin smacked their way into prominence.

This, however, may be the most powerful collection ever assembled. The likes of Redford Bishop Borgess' Debbie McDonald, Garden City's Massey Ward and Livonia Stevenson's Kristine Bailey are just the tip of the power block. Redford Union's Marie Becker, Ladywood's Cathy Schram and Livonia Churchill's Jackie Wozniak more than hold their own in such company.

BUT THERE is more to this squad than just power hitting. Each player selected excels in all phases of the game: front row, back row, passing and serving.

With such talent, it's no wonder that Observerland teams have been represented in the state's final four the past four years. Borgess was this year's leader, losing to Portage Northern in the state championship match.

Because of his team's success, this season and the three previous seasons, Borgess coach Jerry Abraham has been selected Observerland Coach of the Year.

Here's a look at the 1986 All-Area volleyball team as selected by the area coaches:

FIRST TEAM

Debbie McDonald, senior, Bishop Borgess: Division 1 college recruiters made McDonald one of the most sought-after players in the country and for good reason. The slender 6-1 slammer, a two-time All-Area choice, could dominate a match from any position on the floor. She was the driving force behind Borgess' 39-6 record.

The University of Purdue landed McDonald's volleyball skills and her 3.5 grade point average.

Her forte, it almost goes without saying, is hitting. She averaged 10 kills per game and kept would-be blockers off balance with an array of off-side tips.

Missey Ward, senior, Garden City: Talk about deceptive power. To look at her slender, 5-7 physique, one wouldn't expect the power that Ward unleashed on the court.

In 1,320 spike attempts, she missed only 96 times and nailed 519 for kills. She was also a lightning-quick blocker and consistent passer. Garden City lost four starters from the previous season, but with Ward in charge, the team posted a 44-6 record this season.

A second-team all-star, she was named the most valuable player of the Northwest Suburban League. She was



The 1986 All-Area volleyball team (left to right): Ann Toraki (Borgess), Missey Ward (Garden City), Kristine Bailey (Stevenson), Debbie McDonald (Borgess), Jerry Abraham (coach, Borgess), Jackie Wozniak (Churchill), Marie Becker (Red-

ford Union), Carol Hall (John Glenn) and Cathy Schram (Ladywood). Diana Swoppe of Wayne is absent.

STEVE FEIGHT/staff photographer

the MVP of the Plymouth Salem Invitational and was named to three all-tournament teams (including Schoolcraft).

The 3.6 student accepted a volleyball scholarship from Oakland University.

Kristine Bailey, junior, Livonia Stevenson: Sometimes it's best to just state the stats: 841 successful spikes, 339 kills; 345 successful serves out of 375 attempts with 78 aces; and 209 blocks with 62 aces.

No wonder Stevenson coach Lee Cagle calls Bailey "the most well-rounded volleyball-skilled athlete we've ever had."

The third-team all-star made all-Western Lakes, all-region and two all-tournament teams in this her first season as a full-time player.

Like McDonald and Ward, Bailey has the ability to gain complete control of a match — ask any team that faced the Spartans in the Schoolcraft Invitational (which Stevenson won for the third straight year).

See the smile on Cagle's face? That's because she'll be back next season.

Marie Becker, senior, Redford Union: Because Redford Union won very few volleyball matches, Marie Becker probably didn't gain the recognition

that she deserved across the state.

Another deceptively powerful hitter (she's 5-9), Becker was 91 percent effective on her spikes, nailing 588 of 640 attempts. She had 285 kills. She added another 122 successful spikes and 58 more kills off back-row attacks.

She was 91 percent effective both setting and serving. Out of 370 successful serves, she scored 70 aces.

Becker will attend Saginaw Valley next fall on a basketball scholarship.

Cathy Schram, senior, Ladywood: Schram has a rare athletic gift: She can raise the level of her game to meet the challenges of the competition. Her in-

spired play, for example, led the Blazers to the Class B district championship at Allen Park.

On a good Ladywood team, Schram was the best hitter and passer, and one of the top three servers. She was a first-team all-Catholic League choice.

Her achievements weren't attained without pain, however. She played half the season with a strained back and the final two weeks with a broken finger.

"She never once complained," said Ladywood coach Mike O'Toole. "She's my kind of player."

Jacki Wozniak, senior, Livonia Churchill: There must be some kind of

correlation between excellence in the classroom and excellence on the volleyball court. Wozniak, a lethal 6-0 spiker (with an 18-inch vertical jump), earned a 4.03 grade point average at Churchill.

Her talents, both in the front row and back row, helped Churchill amass a 30-11 record. She was an all-tournament pick at Schoolcraft Tournament and a first-team all-Western Lakes pick.

She was offered a volleyball scholarship from Rollins College in Florida.

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Farmington trio quits Observer meet

By Chris McCosky
staff writer

Generally speaking, there are three prizes highly coveted by Observerland track coaches during the course of a season. The most highly valued prize is the league championship. Next is the state regional meet (which leads to the state finals).

The third prize is the Observerland Relays championship. The annual event, which attempts to bring together all the teams serviced by the Observer Newspapers, has grown in both popularity and prestige over the course of its 15-year history.

"It's a great meet," said Livonia Churchill coach Fred Price, who hosts and directs the meet. "Our kids start thinking about that meet almost from the first day of practice."

Said Plymouth Salem coach Gary Balconk: "We tell our kids every year that the most important meet is the conference championship. Then we look at our weekend meets. The most important has to be the regional. After that comes the Observerland. It's a special meet. It's the pride of the area. I would hate not to be there."

"Hogwash!" say the three Farmington Public School District high schools.

FARMINGTON, NORTH Farmington and Farmington Harrison will not compete in the 16th annual Observerland Boys Track and Field Relays (scheduled for May 3), nor will they compete in the Redford Union-Observerland Girls Track and Field Relays (scheduled for May 10).

"The Observerland Relays are just a duplicate of the (Western Lakes) conference meet," said Farmington coach Dave Catherman, whose Falcons look to have one of the best boys track teams in the area this season. "I'm just not interested in seeing the same people all the time. And I've not been pleased with the way the meet is run. I don't have any answers, but it's such a long, drawn-out affair."

Actually, of the 11 teams signed up so far this season, six are from outside the Western Lakes conference.

Instead of competing at Observerland, the three Farmington schools organized their city meet for Saturday, May 3 (all three teams compete in the Western Lakes). But, according to Catherman, the city meet may be scratched.

"We wanted to have our city meet on that Saturday, but with the new schedule (three new teams, including North Farmington, were brought into the Western Lakes), conflicts came up. Now it's looking like we may lose the city meet."

THE FARMINGTON teams, although generally strong in league competition, have never fared well at the Observerland meet.

"We never have gone into the weekend meets with any team goals," Catherman said. "We just look at it as an individual opportunity for the kids."

Price doesn't see it that way. "Dave (Catherman) has never been real positive about the meet, even long before it came to Churchill," he said. "His teams have not done well here — for one reason or another he just doesn't like the meet. The meet doesn't really fit his team."

"I'll tell you what, it's not his kids (who want to pull out of the meet). He did it himself. He is an excellent coach and always has excellent teams, but his teams don't usually have the depth you need to do well in this type of meet. But you don't just back out."

CATHERMAN SAID he prefers the type of meet format used in the West Bloomfield Invitational, where emphasis is placed on individual events rather than three-person and four-person relay teams.

"I would really like to see them (Observerland) change the format," he said. "The trend these days

seems to be away from the relay races and toward more individual races. That way, the kids at least have a chance to get qualifying times for regionalals."

The Observerland meet features 16 events, three of which are individual races.

"It's just a matter of philosophy," Catherman said. "The Observerland has become such a hotly contested event, and all the conflicts they had last year, I just don't like the taste. I've been criticized for not going after the Observerland meet, but we peak for the league meet. And if you notice, we've done quite well at the league meet."

Last year, Churchill won both the Observerland and Western Lakes titles. This year, the Western Lakes conference meet and the Observerland are 3½ weeks apart.

ONE OF THE things that has happened," said Price, "is that the meet has become monopolized a bit in recent years. Salem, Churchill and Borgess have been the dominant teams. Maybe interest is waning from that standpoint. But it's hard for me to say because are kids get so pumped for Observerland. It is disappointing to see teams up and pull out. Sometimes that causes others to do the same."

Right now, 11 teams have contracted for the meet. Others, like Wayne Memorial, may also join the field. Last year, 15 teams competed.

"It has always been a good meet and it still is," Price said. "If the Farmington schools want to compete somewhere else, that's fine. The meet will go on without them. And it'll be a good meet."

Catherman indicated that the action taken by the three Farmington-area programs this season was not permanent.

"I'm not sure we're going to stay out forever," he said.



Al Stebbins (left, of Farmington) and Kirk Armstrong (North), two of the top distance runners in the area, will not compete in this year's Observerland Relays. The three Farmington high schools have bowed out of the competition.