

ESG — Scholastic Volleyball

Pressure off men's team; women seek seventh straight gold

by PATRICK J. NAGY
Reporter

The Western Region scholastic men's volleyball team has set the standard for winning gold at the Empire State Games.

In the 30-year history of the Games, Western has won gold 24 times, but unlike years past, they're not going in as the clear-cut favorite.

Last year, Long Island did what

no other region has done in 11 years by defeating Western for gold — 25-16 in one-game playoff — ending the second-longest gold medal streak for any Western sport.

So why was losing last year a good omen heading into this year's Games in Binghamton?

"Losing actually takes a lot of pressure off of us," said Western men's scholastic volleyball coach Kyle Salisbury. "The kids know

they can win. It's a matter of putting it together."

Salisbury returns two players — Rochester's Kevin Curry and Phelps' E.J. Wells-Spicer — and debuts four who were on the practice squad in 2007, two of which are from Buffalo — Lancaster's Derek Jansma and Amherst's Dan Miranda.

Jansma was an All-Western New York second-team right side hitter in 2007 and is going to be a senior at Lancaster High School.

"I'm definitely excited to be representing my region," said the 6-foot-2 Jansma. "I know it was disappointing for them when they didn't win last year so it's important that we win gold."

Jansma is going to be playing with fellow Lancaster High School senior-to-be and ESG teammate, Craig Freier. Freier, 6-5, can play on the outside or backup at middle blocker.

"I think we need to play with our hearts out," said Freier, an ECIC Division I first-team pick last fall. "When they lost to Long Island, they did not put everything on the floor. I know the talent is here to do it."

Freier said it's nice to have Jansma on the team, not only to see a familiar face, but because Jansma usually sets up Freier for hits during the high school season.

Miranda was an ECIC Division I second-team middle hitter who just graduated from Sweet Home but is still able to play on the scholastic team because his birthday is after August 31. Miranda turns 18 in November. The old rule stated that scholastic teams were only open for athletes up to their senior year of high school.

"It seems like I've been given a second chance," said Miranda, who is playing this fall at Nazareth College. "Making the Empire team is a goal I've wanted to achieve since I started playing volleyball."

Miranda, 6-4, is the only Western player to play club volleyball with Power Station in Orchard Park. Jansma, Freier and North Tonawanda's Bryan Proch play with Eden Volleyball Club. The other six kids play club volleyball through Pace Bootlegger in Rochester.

Salisbury, an assistant men's volleyball coach at Nazareth College, said a challenge for him is to

mesh the players together to get a sense of team unity. That's why he recently held a three-day camp at Nazareth.

"I've met most of the kids through club and high school volleyball so the camp gave me the opportunity to get to know them better," said Salisbury.

"The camp was more of getting Buffalo and Rochester kids together who had never played on the same team before," said Miranda. "It went extremely well. We played every day from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. with a one-hour lunch break."

So far, Salisbury thinks team defense will be a huge strength, which will allow them to keep the ball in play longer.

Other members on Western are Clifton Springs' Erin Kelly, Phelps' Dan Mowery, Webster's Brian Page, and Rochester's Matt Sutherland.

Western opens pool play against Adirondack at 1:30 p.m. on Thursday at Cortland State College.

Women's

While the scholastic men's gold medal streak is over, the scholastic women's streak is still going strong.

Western has won the last six gold medals and there's no reason to think the streak will end this year.

Much of the scholastic women's success, much like the men's, comes from the athletes competing on club volleyball teams.

"These kids play year round and are getting scholarships through club," said Western women's scholastic coach Rob Werkmeister. "The kids also are doing a lot of camps."

"Club volleyball is huge," added Lancaster High senior-to-be Allyson Severyn. "There's so much good competition."

Seven of the 10 players on the 2008 Western roster play for Werkmeister's VolleyFX club team in Rochester, including Tonawanda native and Sweet Home High School soon-to-be senior, Kelsey Maving.

The 5-4 Maving is returning for her third year on Western and will start at libero. Maving, who has set for Sweet Home since she was a seventh-grader, switched to libero two years ago for club volleyball and the ESGs.

"To me, playing libero feels like home," said Maving.

Maving, an All-Western New York and All-ECIC first-team pick, verbally committed to the University of Connecticut the summer between her sophomore and junior year. She is a top-20 recruit at her position.

"She displays great court leadership," said Werkmeister. "All of the kids look up to her. She's a leader on and off the court."

Other members from VolleyFX on Western are Rochester's Mary Cushman and Samantha Good, North Tonawanda's Samantha and Sydney Palka, Pittsford's Kaja Schirmer, and Ontario's Megan Turner. Fairport's Alexie Harnett has practiced with VolleyFX for the past month. Good, Samantha and Sydney Palka, Turner and Good are returning players.

The two other members on Western, Severyn, and Eden's Stacey Smith, play club volleyball with Niagara Frontier.

Severyn, a soon-to-be senior at St. Mary's of Lancaster, earned All-WNY first-team honors and was Monsignor Martin Association MVP. She helped St. Mary's qualify for the New York State Championships.

Severyn will hit on the outside and serve as a defensive specialist, meaning she'll have a chance to play in the back row with Maving. Like Maving, Severyn has verbally committed to playing libero at a Division I college but she's staying local as she'll attend Canisius College.

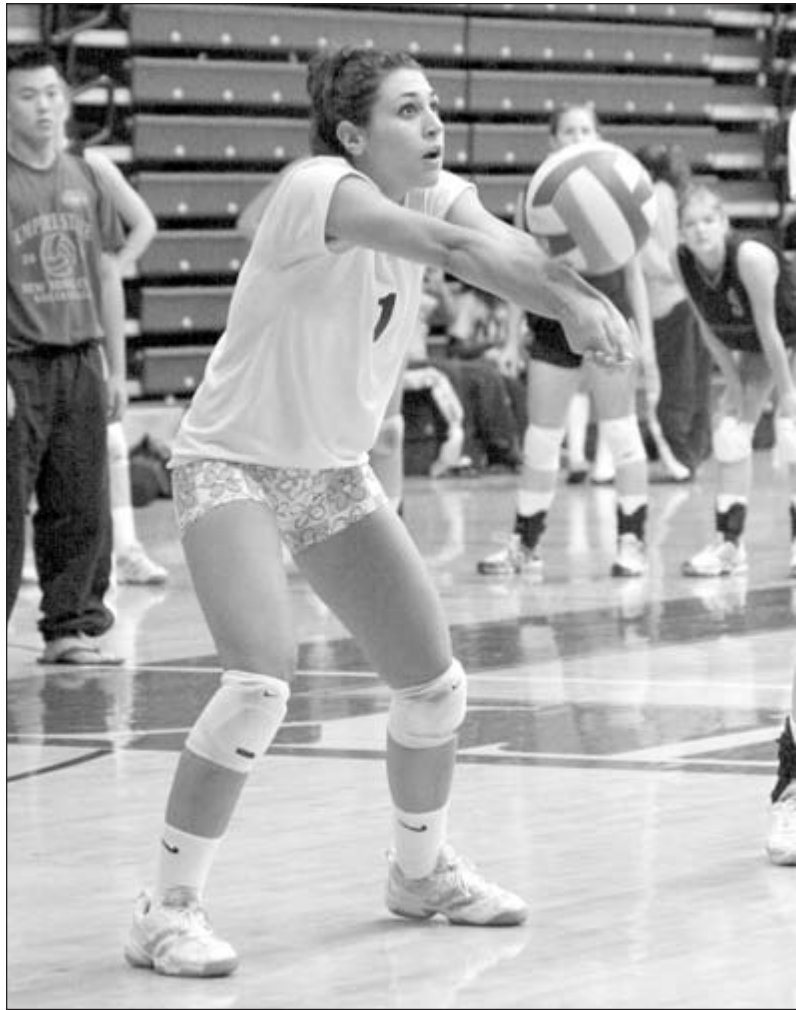
"She has great ball control," said Werkmeister.

Overall, Werkmeister said the team is the tallest he's had in a decade, there's a lot of experience coming back, the front row attackers can hit at least 9-6, the ball control and serving is outstanding, and the entire roster plays at a fast pace.

"Cathy (Hummel, other scholastic women's coach), and I had a team built like this three or four years ago and we did not drop a game and went undefeated in match play," said Werkmeister. "Last year, it was the first time here for a lot of the kids and they fought through to win. This year, I think we'll come back and show our skill, ability, and experience."


Western opens pool play against New York City at 9 a.m. on Thursday at Cortland State College.

e-mail: pnagy@beenews.com



Kelsey Maving, a Tonawanda native and senior-to-be at Sweet Home High School, makes her third appearance on the Western Region's scholastic women's volleyball team. Western is vying for a seventh straight gold medal.

File photo




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UBAM announces JO team

The UB Amherst Swim Club will be well represented at this weekend's Summer Junior Olympic Swimming Championship at the University at Buffalo's Alumni Arena.

UBAM girls competing are: Morgan Allender, Alyssa Anderson, Calista Athans, Zoe Bowmen, Kelsey Bradbury, Erin Cavaganaro, Caroline Desiderio, Alexandria Doody, Ally Dziama, Heather Falk, Tori Frustaci, Alyssa Helak, Victoria Jocko, Sara Lagree, Sara & Therese Mastrandrea, Piava Rioli, Jamie Ruh, Maggie Schmidt, Emma Scumaci, Lauren Shine, Caroline Terhaar, Kristin Tymchak, Nan Wang, Abby Wilkes, Becca Winnert, and Brenna Woodling.

UBAM boys competing are: Mike Anderson, Brandon Beckingausen, Aaron Bell, Matt Berus, Stephen Berus, Mike Burns, Dan & Eugene Cho, Andy Engelbach-Shafer, Matt Geiger, Ben Greenspan, Huibo Guan, Joe Jabrucki, Jayman Jhattu, James Jiang, Kevin Kim, Michael Le, Michael Lin, John Lyons, Rob Novak, Alex Rindo, Marc Ruzsaj, Greg Staebell, Mike Tomes, Mark Wallace, and Larry Zhou.

UBAM recently formed a "swimmer alliance" with Southtown power STAR Swimming that will allow the swimmers from the two clubs to compete together as one team. Together, STAR/UBAM will send 110 swimmers to the Summer JO Team Championship.

The partnership between STAR and UBAM has resulted in the formation of most dominant team in the Niagara District whose purpose is to create additional opportunities for swimmers throughout Western New York. The geographic locations of each club allows for promotion of the combined team throughout Buffalo, linking the swimming talent from the North and Southtowns, while offering two world class natatoriums that are accessible to all swimmers. UBAM practices at UB's Alumni Arena and the Williamsville School Pools, whereas STAR practices at ECC's Flickinger Center, ECC South as well as Frontier Middle School.

For information about UBAM Swimming, visit www.UBAMswimming.com. For more information about STAR Swimming, visit www.STARswimming.org.