

LANCER VOLLEYBALL

Belleville East Student Newspaper

By: Steven Stock



It's been a tough last few weeks for the girls' volleyball program as their season came to an abrupt end in late October. Belleville East was deemed ineligible for the postseason and was disqualified for the Regional Semifinal versus Collinsville. The Lancers received a forfeit loss to end their season. It's an ending that sucks and one that hurts after an honest mistake. Fans can only ponder about the ending. While it is heartbreaking, it's not about how much it hurts and the downside of it. I want to keep this positive and talk about how great of a team this was. I want to talk about their successes, and everything they were able to do. They deserve recognition for everything they were able to accomplish. We can sit here all day and ask how far this team could have gone

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and what they could have done. That's fair, but to me, it's worth talking about how great this season was for Belleville East.

Head Coach Abby Hanger, in her third season here at East, has set a foundation of consistency and success. In her first season, Belleville East went 16-18 and went to the Regional Championship match, forcing the mighty O'Fallon Panthers to a third set. The next season, Coach Hanger had an incredible season going 23-12 with a third-place finish in the Southwestern Conference. This season, Belleville East finished with a 21-16 record and accomplished many things. First is the success of the East program. Belleville East has not seen back-to-back 20-win seasons since 2001 and 2002. They also have not had a 75-game stretch like this since 2000-2002. As part of their 21 victories this year, Belleville East was able to come home with a 6th place finish in the Brace for Impact tournament against some very good and competitive teams which included senior Layla Pelly bringing home the All-Tournament Team. The Lancers were able to knock off very solid teams in Gibault, Liberty MO twice, Triad, Collinsville twice, and Belleville West. The Lancers had incredible talent on this team in addition to Pelly's All-Tournament team award. Both Grace Manche and Naava Sprinkle did the same in other tournaments. Outside of that, Belleville East had a unique roster: a combination of upperclassmen with underclassmen who all contributed. The Lancers had seven seniors all playing with underclassmen including two freshmen getting valuable playing time. With strong senior leadership and how much of a family the group of girls is, the Lancers are in a great position for next season and years beyond.

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Being able to follow the girls for most of the season and knowing them all well, I know how bad this ending hurts for them. All year, they've had to battle and work very hard to get where they are. They've had rough stretches in the season and moments in the season when morale was low. They've had to fight in numerous games, playing very tough opponents and making it close every single time. They've continued to work hard and fight through any obstacle. There is one quote that I've repeated all season that I think describes this group of girls very well, "East has a bunch of fighters on that court. Give me any six of our girls and they're going head-to-toe with any other six girls in the conference. They're gonna give them a battle and fight to the end". They've worked so hard and it's shown on the court all season. One of the biggest things I've witnessed from the girls is how much of a family they are. They all support and encourage each other. They work with each other. They love each other. They're a family and are together. Out of the teams I've received the chance to cover at Belleville East, this volleyball team is easily the most close and together I've seen.

At the end of the day, that question of what these last few weeks could have held for Belleville East will always haunt me. We will never know what this group of girls could have continued to do. It hurts to think like that, but there is one thing I know for sure about these girls: they're fighters who worked hard for everything. They're a family and accomplished many things. It is to be realized and remembered this was a special bunch for Belleville East. A special bunch of girls that have achieved so much. I hope we all can be proud of them and use that as an ending to a season that included many ups and

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downs, a season that included happiness and sadness, a season that had its jokes and laughter and sadness. The ending should not take away what this season meant to everyone involved in this program. With all this, I always will be proud of this team and hope that you will too.