

Nichols Making Most of Talent, Opportunity

By Ryan Anderson
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BAYTOWN - Last season, Melanie Nichols of Baytown saw a lot of action as a member of the Lee College Lady Rebels volleyball team. "Saw" being the operative word as Nichols spent much of the season watching the action in a reserve role.

This season, instead of seeing the action from the sidelines, Nichols, a 5-foot-9-inch outside hitter, is a major force in the Lady Rebels' quest for a national title.

That transformation from part-time player to full-time, go-to player came about after Nichols spent the off-season working on improving her game. That dedication did not go unnoticed.

"Melanie really pushed herself during the off-season and is in top condition," said Tracie Johnson, Lady Rebels head coach. "Her dedication to the team is commendable. Her contributions can be felt both on and off of the court. She truly is a team leader."

While Nichols has made huge strides in the caliber of her game over last season, she acknowledges that it is still a work in progress.

"I've really worked hard on improving my hitting for this season, but I still want to improve my serving and definitely work on my defense," Nichols said. "I really want to improve my all-around game this season."

Volleyball is a family affair for Nichols. After watching her sister play and serving as team manager during sixth grade, Nichols took to the court herself during seventh grade.

"I had just been around it so much with my sister that I decided to give it a try," Nichols said.

Now that she has been playing organized volleyball for more than six years, Nichols feels she can really see the benefits of the court, as well.

"Playing volleyball has really helped me to be more disciplined and responsible in all aspects of my life," Nichols said.

Nichols' immediate plans include helping to lead the Lady Rebels back to the national tournament. Following her Lee College career, Nichols hopes to continue her education in pursuit of a kinesiology degree at a school yet to be determined. Ultimately, Nichols hopes that a career as a high school volleyball coach will follow her education.

Aside from being a hitter, Nichols sees her role on the team as that of an encourager to her teammates.

“It is very important for me to try to motivate and encourage my teammates whenever I can,” Nichols said.

While Nichols tries to act as a motivator to her team, she finds her own motivation from the fact that she is one of only 11 volleyball players under scholarship at Lee College.

“I am very fortunate to have a very awesome volleyball scholarship,” Nichols said. “The scholarship really motivates me to try my best and work hard each and every time I’m on the court because there are some four-year schools that don’t have as nice of a scholarship as we have.”

Nichols’ success is not limited to the court, however. She was awarded the Lee College Class Act award twice for her efforts in the classroom. The Class Act award was established by Athletic Director Guthmiller to honor athletes who maintain a grade point average above 3.0. Last semester Nichols earned a perfect 4.0 GPA.

As her dedication to improving her game, and her attention to detail in the classroom illustrate, Nichols believes the best piece of advice is to never give up.

“I know it sounds simple, but I really do believe that the key to life is to never give up, even when things get hard,” Nichols said. “Just keep at it, and you’ll come out a better person at the other end.”