

Makenna Hallager helped create successful blueprint for Merion Mercy Volleyball

By Eddie Levin

Merion – Makenna Hallager may not have finished this season or her high school career as they would have hoped, but the blueprint she helped create for the volleyball team will be one she won't soon forget.

Following her team's straight set loss to Allentown Central Catholic in the opening round of the state 3A volleyball tournament, Hallager, an aspiring architect, began to reflect on her athletic career at Merion that concluded with the team's first trip to the state tournament at the 3A level and their first since 2011 when they won the 2A district tournament.

"Although the season did not end the way we hoped it did in a way," said Hallager following her final high school match. "We all wanted the season to be the best one yet filled with memories and accomplishments we would not forget. Putting puzzle pieces together to create this picture of going undefeated in our district and then going to states was a team effort. I think it would be selfish to take all the credit in making all of this happen because overall I think each individual brought something to this season that was ideal and we would not have gotten this far if one person was taken away."

"Her years of experience on the court coupled with her ambitions of becoming an architect really paid off," said Merion Mercy Volleyball coach Jolen Aldaya. "Her leadership on the floor and ability to improvise and adapt while the play was going was also important. It was great to see her draw on her experience."

Junior outside hitter Nicole Nowlan added, "Playing the same position as Makenna, I was able to look up to her not only as a leader on the team, but was given a personal role model specific to what I needed to do on the court. The main thing that I have learned from Mak is the importance of leadership and teamwork that she showed me persistently through her actions."

In a year that began with the Golden Bears having the chance to play the first sporting event in their new state-of-the-art multi-purpose facility to qualifying for the state tournament for the first time since moving up to the 3A level two years ago, the seniors certainly left an indelible imprint.

"The seniors as a whole were a vital part of our team, as they made up the majority of varsity and were the biggest leaders on our team," said Nowlan. "Makenna specifically stuck out as a strong presence on the court, playing all the way around and being a co-captain. She made it a goal to keep us all positive on the court and remained consistently up-beat and positive herself."

With the construction of new the building going on during her junior year, Hallager was fortunate to see the parallel of her academic and athletic career. While blueprints play an

integral role in the completion of a building they also play an underlying role in the on and off court success of a team.

“There is a powerful connection for me,” said Hallager, referring to when she looks into the gym from the art room located directly across the hallway. “I am finishing my time at MMA in new, versatile facilities that tie right into my distinct passions: volleyball and art. The new gym and art center provide the spaces and resources for me to advance both in the classroom and on the court.”

Throughout the process Hallager patiently waited as she realized how special her senior year would be both academically and athletically.

“It was very valuable and rewarding especially since past graduates did not get the same opportunity,” said Hallager who will be attending and playing volleyball at Juniata College in the fall. “The new spaces bring several positive qualities to the academic and athletic side of Merion and being one of the first students to experience that first hand has been interesting and exciting especially because we have some spaces we have found that we can use for multiple purposes and it just allows for more creation and collaboration amongst students and athletes.”

As the school year continues to wind down, Hallager and her fellow seniors will continue to leave their mark on the value of the new facility.