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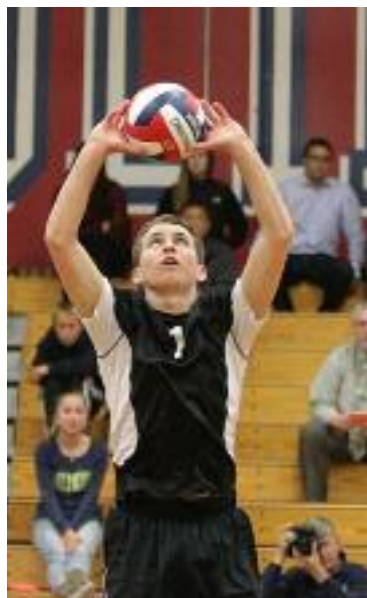
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Volleyball Powerhouse Takes Root in Contra Costa County

By Karl Buscheck



Joe Worsley Photo Gint Federas



Gage Worsley



Jack Eisner

When it comes to club volleyball, it doesn't get any bigger than the Pacific Rim Volleyball Academy, the rising national powerhouse headquartered in Contra Costa County.

"Nationally speaking on the boys side, everyone recognizes who we are based on the accomplishments of several of our teams," said Roger Worsley, the club director of the Pacific Rim, which fields club teams for both boys and girls in middle school and high school.

Worsley is also the head coach of the 18-and-under squad, which has played a central role in building that prominent reputation by recently winning consecutive national championships. The Pacific Rim under-18 team wrapped up its second title on July 4, smashing past The HBC 18 Black 25-21 and 25-19 at the Columbus Convention Center in Ohio.

That clash wasn't the first time the two teams met. In fact, HBC beat the Pacific Rim three times during the season. Ultimately, it was the previous experience on the biggest stage that helped Pacific Rim down their Southern California rival.

"We had the confidence that we were capable of completing such a feat," Worsley said. "Our objective every year—as we talked about—is to win a national championship or at least compete for a national championship."

The road to a repeat wasn't without obstacle. Throughout the league portion of the season, Pacific Rim

rarely had its entire team together because many of its players were also focused on college recruitment and the demands of their local high school teams. But the Pacific Rim players didn't let that lack of playing time become a distraction.

"We knew what we were capable of doing and what our primary objective was and that was to get back to nationals and win a national championship," Worsley said. "You never really saw the team rattled too much during the course of the league season."

The Pacific Rim under-17 team also enjoyed a successful run during the 2014-2015 season, advancing to the national championship tournament before getting knocked out of the competition. Unlike the under-18 team, whose core had been together since the players were just 14 years old, the U-17 team was only formed at the end of last summer.

"They had been put together just this year," Worsley said. "So, that [under-18] team really was much more bonded and in unison and in sync with each other—whereas the 17's were just starting to gather that momentum and camaraderie."

In order to help the team gain that momentum and camaraderie, the Pacific Rim's brain trust enlisted the help of Sheryl Kline, who coaches high performance mental skills training for athletes.

"The 17's—this is a critical year—[in] boys' volleyball, junior year is your critical year to get recruited and get noticed," Worsley

said. "So, we knew we were under the gun or behind the eight-ball."

Kline was also behind the eight ball when she first began her work with the under-17 team.

"There was a little bit of incredulosity at first when we announced it," Worsley said.

As Kline admitted, the players didn't immediately grasp the value of her program.

"One of the challenges was that it took them a couple of weeks to buy in. They didn't understand what I do," Kline said. "They didn't understand and they weren't totally confident that I was going to be able to help. In other words, they didn't take it seriously for the first couple of weeks. So, that was a challenge."

Once the team started to see results in its tournaments, that all changed.

"Our play took a rather significant change in the positive direction in terms of results," Worsley said. "It was being manifested on the court and manifested in practice that they understood what she was getting at. And they basically took it to heart."

During the season, Kline met with the team on a weekly basis, observed tournaments and worked with players in a one-on-one setting.

"The first change I saw was a mutual respect between the players and the coaches," Kline said. "We established a good foundation for communication between the coaching staff and the players."

Improving the lines of communi-

cation was a crucial aspect of the team's success, as the squad was led by Dipen Patel, a highly respected coach who is only a couple of years older than his players.

"He's one of the top technical coaches in the area and we're really happy to have him along too," Worsley said. "I think that [his coaching] and working with Sheryl were significant in what we accomplished."

The Pacific Rim has only been around for five years, but the club has already developed into a destination for the best of the best.

Three members on the under-18 team were from the Lamorinda area, while the rest of the players came from all across Northern California and beyond.

"We had kids from Texas, Fresno, Hawaii, San Francisco, Novato, San Jose," Worsley said. "So yeah, we had a pretty large spectrum of guys coming

from a large part of Northern California."

Thanks to the club's success, the Pacific Rim's talent base is only growing.

"Our little club has done enough to garner the attention of athletes nationwide who are looking to build themselves, to help their game and we're starting to see them coming in," Worsley said. "We'll have one boy from Virginia this year."

While the Pacific Rim is racking up titles, the ultimate goal is to help the players reach the next level. So far, it's working. Of the 11 seniors on last year's under-18 team, eight will be playing in college.

"Our major emphasis is just getting these guys trained and giving them the best opportunity to be successful and hopefully if they want to play college ball, then play college ball," Worsley said.

Sports Shorts

Football

MaxPreps recently released its preseason high school football rankings, naming Campolindo the No. 17 small-school team heading into the 2015 season. The Cougars will return seven players from last year's state-champion team, including senior wide receiver Max Flower and lineman Sterling Strother. However, the team graduated three of its biggest stars in quarterback Jack Stephens, running back Nick Fadelli, and tight end Tyler Petite. Head Coach Kevin Macy has mixed feelings about the early-season attention. "The pressure is going to be tough," he explained. "Last year we were the Cinderella team, and now everyone wants to beat us." Macy feels the team is behind schedule compared to previous years because of the recently implemented Cooley Bill, which limits contact during summer practice with the aim of preventing concussions.

Basketball

The Orinda-based Cal Stars AAU girls' basketball team won the Nike Invitational July 30, making them the No. 1 club basketball team in the country. Miramonte head coach Kelly Sopak runs the program, and the championship team featured two of his best Matadors — senior shooting guard Sabrina Ionescu, an All-American, and junior Elle Louie. Ionescu forwent an opportunity to play with the 19-and-under US National Team to play for the Stars, deciding a Nike National Title was more important. The Matadors, who lost in the NorCal championship game to St. Mary's last season, are expected to be among the best basketball teams in the country this winter.



Cal Stars AAU girls' basketball team Photo provided

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