

# BC3 coach: Defense key for volleyball squad to net wins

Pioneers to defend consecutive WPCC, Region XX crowns

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Members of the 2019 Butler County Community College volleyball team are, top row, from left, McKenna Dewitt, Kaylee Ebbert, Abby Kopac and Morgan Malinski. Bottom row, from left, Maddy McAninch, Makenzie McDowell, Chyenne Ragle and Michaela Roth.

(Butler, PA) The Butler County Community College volleyball team this fall will rely on defense in defense of its 2018 National Junior College Athletic Association Division III Region XX title and its four consecutive Western Pennsylvania Collegiate Conference crowns, coach Rob Snyder said.

“There are a lot of different ways to win,” said Snyder, a nine-time WPCC coach of the year who through 20 seasons at BC3 is 376-148. “You have to adjust your style of play.”

The Pioneers, who return three players from a 2018 team that finished 19-7 and with the program’s 10th winning season in a row, may adjust by using more back-row hitting and strategic serves – short or well-placed – to counter a lack of height and experienced blockers, Snyder said.

“We always try to be the best serving team that we can be,” Snyder said. “When your offense isn’t strong, your defense has to be stronger and the serve, to me, is the first line of defense. We are giving the opponent the ball, but really it is a defensive maneuver in order to get them off their game and out of their system.”

The addition of libero Maddy McAninch, a Freeport graduate and BC3 freshman, will anchor a back row that may hit as much as the front row this year, Snyder said.

Unlike other positions, the libero can play in the back row for all six rotations.

“So if you have someone who is really strong in the back,” Snyder said, “you get twice as much defense out of them.”

To execute that defense, the Pioneers need to be high-energy, McAninch said.

“Most of the plays that we run are going to come from the defense and be based off of our defense,” McAninch said. “That is one of the most important parts of our team this year.”

As is the return of Abby Kopac, Makenzie McDowell and Kaylee Ebbert, members of a 2018 Pioneers team that claimed their third NJCAA Division III Region XX championship in four years and ninth under Snyder since 1999.

Kopac, of Knoch, was third among the Pioneers in kills with 138 in 2018; and McDowell, of Knoch, and Ebbert, of Mars, were second and fourth, respectively, with 324 and 237 digs.

“All decent hitters,” Snyder said. “When Abby gets her hands on the ball, she has as much power as anybody. We just have to be able to get her the ball. If we can do that, she will be effective.”

Kopac, the Pioneers’ tallest player by 4 inches at 6 foot, will play middle; and McDowell and Ebbert, outside.



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## Past two Pioneer setters All-Americans

McDowell in 2018 was selected to the WPCC all-conference squad after BC3 won its 10th conference crown under Snyder and 15th since 1977. She was also one of four Pioneers and nine players overall from Maryland and Pennsylvania named to the NJCAA Division III All-Region XX squad.

Pioneers freshmen joining McAninch are McKenna Dewitt, of Armstrong, at opposite; and from Slippery Rock, Chyenne Ragle, at defense; Michaella Roth, at middle; and Morgan Malinski, who as BC3's setter will occupy a position that in the past two seasons has produced NJCAA Division III All-Americans in Mackenzie Craig, of Karns City, and Brittney Bianco, of Freeport.

"With Mackenzie, we had to make her into a setter," Snyder said of Craig, who had also played opposite. "She had a little bit of experience, but not a lot. Morgan comes in as one of the most experienced setters. She set all the way through high school. She doesn't need a lot of the training. She has to work on her consistency, and learning my system, but for the most part, she comes in fully formed as a setter.

"She is energetic, likes to get after it and she plays tough defense. I think she is going to be a tough-minded player."

She has to be, Malinski said, so as "not to let the ball hit the ground. That is the whole point of the defense. Keep the ball up.

"And even if it is a scrappy play where I don't get the ball the first time, as long as the ball is up, I will get there somehow."

The Pioneers got to the NJCAA Division III District I/J Tournament semifinals in 2018, where their season ended with a Nov. 3 loss to Owens Community College, of Perrysburg, Ohio.

Owens on Nov. 10 won its first NJCAA Division III national championship by dethroning Eastfield College, of Mesquite, Texas, at the UCR Regional Sports Center in Rochester, Minn.

BC3 opens its 19-match fall 2019 regular season at 6 p.m. Aug. 28 by visiting the Community College of Allegheny County-Boyce in Monroeville. The Pioneers' home opener is set for noon Aug. 31 against Penn State-New Kensington.