



Members of the 2017-18 Butler County Community College volleyball team are, top row, from left, Brittney Bianco, Kelly Kabay, Autumn Rodgers, Kelsey Minnich and Emilee Beck. Bottom row, from left, Haley Caldwell, Madison Morella, Mackenzie Craig, Emily Magusiak and Alexis Schneider.

Communication key as No. 9 BC3 set to defend volleyball crowns

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Rob Snyder, entering his 19th year as Butler County Community College's volleyball coach, has a career record of 339-135.

(Butler, PA) Above the squeaks and echoes inside Butler County Community College's Field House are shouts of "Five! Five! Five!" and "A! A! A!" and "Three! Three! Three!" – sounds of BC3's 2017 volleyball team reacting to the flight of the ball and establishing order in what might otherwise be chaos, Coach Rob Snyder said.

"No team sport," Snyder said, "requires communication like volleyball. Think of a football team that had to run both offense and defense in the same play with no huddles or breaks to switch directions. It would be chaos."

For sophomores Brittney Bianco, Kelly Kabay and Autumn Rodgers, developing communication on a roster welcoming six freshmen will be key in whether BC3 can replicate its 2016 success and uphold a preseason No. 9 ranking among 102 teams in the National Junior College Athletic Association's Division III.

Bianco, Kabay and Rodgers are BC3's sole returning players from a 2016 squad that itself carried over six players from the 2015 team. The Pioneers in 2016 went to win their first 14 matches en route to a 21-3 finish, and second consecutive crowns in the Western Pennsylvania Collegiate Conference and National Junior College Athletic Association Region XX Division III.

"We need to work on more communication with one another and I think that will take time as everyone gets more comfortable with one another and understands how everybody plays," said Bianco, a setter and Freeport Area High graduate who in 2016 was named to the WPCC's all-conference team, and to the NJCAA Region XX Division III all-tournament and all-region squads.

"You need to talk about everything, literally," said Bianco, who in 2016 finished 10th in the NJCAA Division III with 8.75 assists per set. "From when the ball is getting ready to be served from the opposing team to the first pass, to the setter telling the receivers where to pass the ball, to each hitter telling us, the setter, where they are at, what number, so I know where to set the ball to, to how many blocks are up for the hitter to hit around, to what spot is open on the opposing side of the court – everything is communication."

"We definitely communicate well"

Under Snyder, the WPCC's seven-time coach of the year who holds a 339-135 record through 18 seasons, BC3 opens its 18-match regular-season slate by hosting Allegany College of Maryland at noon Saturday.

Joining Bianco and Butler High graduates Rodgers and Kabay on the 2017 roster are freshmen Kelsey Minnich, Armstrong; Emilee Beck and Haley Caldwell, Butler; Madison Morella, Ellwood City; Mackenzie Craig, Karns City; Emily Magusiak, New Castle; and sophomore Alexis Schneider, Butler.

Communication on the court is imperative, Rodgers said, if BC3 is to record its ninth consecutive winning season, capture its 13th WPCC championship and ninth under Snyder, or claim its third straight NJCAA Region XX Division III crown and ninth under Snyder.

"The communication for this season is coming along really, really well, so I am excited for that," said Rodgers, who finished 19th in the NJCAA Division III in 2016 with 1.15 blocks per set. "I have high hopes for us. It is going to be a little bit more difficult and we have to put in more work because we have only three returning players, and last year we had a lot more. But I am excited for this season. We definitely communicate well. And that starts the season out right."

The Pioneers in 2016 were No. 15 overall among 102 teams in NJCAA Division III with 209 blocks; No. 40 with 674 assists; No. 41 with 193 service aces; No. 43 with 728 kills and No. 43 with 1,264 digs.

Among those in the Top 50 in individual categories and none of whom return were Christina Davis, No. 17 with 1.23 blocks per set, and No. 19 with a .369 hitting percentage; Baylee Verner,

No. 30 with 0.95 blocks per set, No. 43 with a .301 hitting percentage, and No. 44 with 2.79 kills per set; Bella Chiodo, No. 33 with 4.32 digs per set; Mary Romano, No. 37 with a .308 hitting percentage and Cassie Berteotti, No. 42 with 0.65 service aces per set.

While Snyder said BC3's weakness may be its inexperience, its strengths may be with its setters – Bianco and eventually, Craig.

“In addition to quality setting, they both can hit, serve and pass, so our right side should be exceptional,” Snyder said. “We also have players that are versatile and can play front and back row. This allows for greater continuity than if you have a team of specialists.”

During Tuesday's practice in the BC3 Field House, Craig shouted “Five! Five! Five!” – where she was positioned on the court – received a pass from Kabay and soared to slam the ball over the top of the 7-foot, 4 1/8-inch net.

Craig, who with Rodgers is BC3's tallest player at 5-foot-10, said she expects BC3 to soar as well in 2017.

“I think we have a pretty strong offense and we are getting better at defense. We are coming along as a team,” she said, “and our communication is getting better each day.”