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Alpha Gamma heightens interest in volleyball

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Meredith Siefert couldn't help but notice the spike in play of a Rye High volleyball teammate since the previous season. The reason was obvious. The girl had joined Alpha Gamma.

That isn't a sorority. That's a volleyball club.

So Siefert decided to make the seven-month commitment after her high school season. Two years have passed, and now the middle/right-side hitter is a 17-year-old Rye graduate bound for college volleyball at Oberlin in Ohio.

"When I went club, I didn't think I could be playing at a college level, wasn't even considering it," Siefert said. "Just playing and getting the experience of all the tournaments that we have and getting seen by a lot of college scouts, now I'm ending up playing at a college level. I definitely wouldn't have been able to have the experience that I'm going to have without Alpha Gamma."

The nonprofit Alpha Gamma Juniors Volleyball Club has been around for four seasons competitively, giving girls from all over the area an opportunity to advance in the game.

Georgia Efthalitsides, the co-director and co-founder along with fellow Sleepy Hollow resident Alicia Murray, says the cost comes in at less than \$2,000 for the November-May season.

Sponsors also are solicited and fundraisers are conducted to help with expenses.

"This is a good thing because the cost is low compared to the other clubs around us," Efthalitsides said. "We are offering it to inner-city and lower-income family households that can afford it. But the kids do have the talent, so we can train them and hopefully get them into the collegiate level."

There were 101 girls and 18 coaches in the program this past season. The players were on eight teams, ranging from 13-and-under to 18-and-under. Six travel-level teams practiced twice a week for up to 2 1/2 hours at Sleepy Hollow High. There were also two developmental regional-level teams that practiced once a week at EF International School in Tarrytown.

The competition is more intense than in high school, according to some of the girls. That can go for the coaching, too. But there's also a payoff.

"My coach, Georgia, helped me out the most," said Katie Baskind, a 14-year-old setter from Ossining who was on Alpha Gamma's 14-and-under first-place team in the club division at the GEVA regional championships April 24 at Queens College.

"Even though she was very strict, that helped me mature as a player. I learned a lot of new things

from her."

Efthalitsides was an all-league volleyball player for Sleepy Hollow and the senior athlete of the year there in 1998 after playing basketball and softball as well.

The Tarrytown native went on to play volleyball and softball at Dean College in Massachusetts. Efthalitsides has coached Ursuline's varsity volleyball team to two league titles in three years. Plus, she guided the College of New Rochelle women's volleyball team to a conference title last season, her first in charge. She runs a women's volleyball league at Sleepy Hollow. And besides her co-director role, she leads two Alpha Gamma teams.

The players have to try out in order to be placed in the proper grouping based on age and ability. Then their hard work begins. Alpha Gamma was born from the desire of Efthalitsides and Murray, the Yonkers High varsity volleyball coach, to offer an alternative.

"We did it together hoping to keep kids busy and off the streets," Efthalitsides said. "We thought at least we could provide some kind of program, which is also why we're looking to build a multisport facility."

Elizabeth Flaherty, from Sloatsburg and Suffern High, Irvington's Gaelle Romain and Harrison's Jessica Segal are club members who will compete for the Hudson Valley Region at the Empire State Games in Buffalo this month.

The club, though, isn't just about athletic endeavors.

The girls do journal writing, be it in regard to the sport, school, innermost thoughts or any concerns. The coaches read the journals and respond. Efthalitsides said kids have been helped emotionally through this route.

The players also have to turn in their report cards. They must maintain a 2.5 GPA to stay eligible. There are lessons about time management, discipline, respect and self-esteem along the way.

"It's meant learning good sportsmanship and being an overall student-athlete," said Allison Amatuzzo, a 16-year-old New City resident who will be a junior at Clarkstown North. "I've learned so many new positions and met so many new people. It's made me a well-rounded person."

Additional Facts

Learn more

For more information on the Alpha Gamma Juniors Volleyball Club, go to alphagammapvolleyball.org, e-mail AlphaGammaVB@aol.com or call 914-610-5876.
