

Gifted volleyball talent strengthens Westfield team

By Kristen Leigh Porter

kristen.leigh.porter@indystar.com

September 6, 2007

Shamrocks player flies under the radar

WESTFIELD -- Never heard of Hilary Eppink? She doesn't play for one of the tradition-rich programs dotting the metro area volleyball landscape, so you might not know much about the Westfield High School junior.

She's the one deflating balls with her powerful spikes and thwarting opposing passers with her high-velocity jump serves. All the while wearing a smile.

"Not a whole lot of people know who I am, so it gives me a chance to put myself out there and show everyone how Westfield can do," she said.

The 6-foot-2 Eppink is a big reason why the Shamrocks entered the week with a 7-3 record. She was tops with 91 kills in 159 attempts, and also had 52 blocks, 21 digs and 12 aces.

While the general public might not know her name, rest assured many of the top college coaches do.

Eppink, who lists Purdue, Kentucky, Minnesota, Notre Dame and Wisconsin as her top five, enjoys the attention when college recruiters come out to watch her matches. She will make her college pick in the next few months.

"I feel like she's secretly the No. 1 recruit in the nation," Westfield coach Stacie Pagnard said. "She doesn't get a bunch of publicity. But there's just tons of people who see her potential."

Eppink boasts a standing reach of 7 feet, 11 inches. To put that in perspective, the height of the net is 7 feet, 41/8 inches.

Her freshman year at Westfield, Eppink had 225 kills and 122 blocks. The following summer, while competing for Team Indiana at the 2006 USA Volleyball Junior Olympic Championships, she was named to the all-tournament team for the Girls' 15 American division.

Last season, Eppink upped her totals to 307 kills and 126 blocks.

"She's just a phenomenal athlete and she's been super dedicated to the sport," Pagnard said. "We've pieced things together every year. Last year, we were working on her arm swing. Now we're working on her blocking. Just everything. She's maturing and now she's a pressure player."

Eppink already holds one school record, for blocks in a game, with eight earlier this year against Harrison.

During her club training, she has mastered hitting quicker sets. She is learning how to adjust her hitting strategy if she doesn't get the set she's looking for, so she's always a weapon.

"It feels awesome; you want to keep doing it over and over again," Eppink said of registering a kill. "It gets you points and puts the other team down. It feels good."

Said Pagnard: "I'm glad she's on our side."