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Determination to excel at volleyball pays off

By Kristen Leigh Porter

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Sarah Havel didn't make the seventh-grade volleyball team at Clay Middle School. But instead of quitting, she honed her skills playing with the Carmel Dads' Club and for a local club team.

Havel's hard work has paid off. Now a Carmel High School senior, the 6-foot-2 middle hitter recently made an oral commitment to play for the College of Charleston, an NCAA Division I school located in South Carolina.

"I just wanted to stick with it," said Havel, who made the eighth-grade volleyball team at Clay the next year. "I really liked volleyball."

Havel made the seventh- and eighth-grade basketball teams at Clay but concentrated on volleyball once she hit high school. After playing on the freshman volleyball team her first year at Carmel, she excelled on the junior varsity as a sophomore and earned a spot on varsity as a junior. This season, Havel averages better than two kills per game for the Greyhounds.

"I knew that I would eventually come into myself, so I kept with it," she said.

Havel also has stepped out of the shadow of her twin sister Danielle, a gifted athlete who earned All-North second team honors in volleyball the past two seasons despite playing the sport less than four months out of the year due to basketball commitments. Considered a D-I hoops prospect, Danielle opted not to play volleyball this season.

Despite being 15 minutes older, Sarah felt like a late bloomer compared to her sister.

"It's been big just getting over the whole Danielle thing, (her) being Miss All-Star of every sport," Sarah Havel said jokingly.

Now, Danielle attends nearly all home volleyball matches to support her "big" sister.

"I've always looked up to her as an older sister, even though she's my twin," Danielle Havel said. "To see her improve and compete in everything she does is (heartwarming)."

Sarah Havel has grown into a leadership role this season, serving as a team captain with fellow senior Sarah Harbison. She also is growing into her frame.

Already, Havel boasts a standing reach of 7 feet, 9 1/2 inches -- more than five inches higher than the net.

"Sarah probably will not physically mature still yet for another year or so," said William Bastin, the Greyhounds' second-year coach. "She needs to start getting a lot of strength and she needs to get weight on her body. When she does . . . she's going to be outstanding."

Havel was set on the College of Charleston after making an unofficial visit. She also looked at other schools.

"It's been the biggest relief of my entire life," Havel said of making her college choice.

The Cougars were 27-8 overall and 17-1 in the Southern Conference last season, earning their sixth consecutive conference title and fourth trip to the NCAA Tournament in the past five seasons. College of Charleston is led by first-year coach Jason Kepner, who took over for current Indiana University coach Sherry Dunbar.

"I feel like I can help build the program, just help in the middle," Havel said.

Danielle Havel made her first official visit to Ball State this past weekend and has a few visits planned to other schools. She likely will make a decision on where to play basketball within a month.