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Volleyball player sees future in Dayton

Carmel junior Valerie Akerhielm makes oral commitment to join sister on Ohio team

By Kristen Leigh Porter

kristen.leigh.porter@indystar.com

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College will feel just like home to Valerie Akerhielm.

The Carmel High School junior has made an oral commitment to play volleyball at the University of Dayton, where older sister Bethany is a sophomore hitter.

"It's just something that doesn't really happen very often, so it's exciting," Valerie, a 5-9 libero, said of sisters playing for the same college team.

Bethany, a 6-4 middle, will welcome her sister in fall 2008.

The two sisters were never on the court together in high school, as Valerie was a freshman on the Greyhounds' junior varsity team while Bethany starred as a senior for the varsity.

"It's going to be nice to have a member of my family with my volleyball family," Bethany said.

Valerie already has visited the Dayton campus about a dozen times, either to attend Bethany's matches or to hang out with her sister and her teammates. Valerie last visited in late January for Bethany's birthday.

Sunday night, Valerie told Dayton coach Tim Horsman she also would like to be a Flyer. She also considered the College of Charleston and Loyola University Chicago.

"At other schools, I didn't know the players, and at Dayton, I know them on the volleyball court and off the volleyball court," Valerie said. "It was more a comfort-level thing. I already knew the coaches and players (at Dayton), so that was something I liked about it."

"She knows all the girls on the team already and they're excited she's coming, too," Bethany said.

This past season, the Flyers finished 22-11, their 13th consecutive winning season. Bethany Akerhielm played in 25 matches, collecting 120 kills, 47 total blocks and 35 digs.

Parents Lynn and Rob Akerhielm said they would support their daughter no matter where Valerie ended up, but having two daughters on the same team means they only follow one squad.

"It's a lot less travel, but that wasn't important to us at all. We wanted her to follow her heart and do what she wanted to do," Rob Akerhielm said. "She knows it's going to be a challenge and she's looking forward to it."

Thursday, Valerie Akerhielm headed to Pittsburgh to play in a tournament with Team Indiana 17-1's Rage team that includes fellow Greyhounds Sarah Harbison and Sarah Havel.

Valerie is back at full strength after sustaining a shoulder injury last September that caused her to miss nearly a month of the season. She returned to action in October just in time for

the postseason, helping Carmel to the sectional title. The Indianapolis Star All-North second team pick amassed 394 digs, an average of 4.98 per game.

Her college destination in place, Valerie can focus on improving her game.

"It's so nice to be able to know and not have to worry about that now," Valerie said.

This summer, Valerie is planning to attend an advanced camp at Dayton with the other recruits from the Class of 2008.