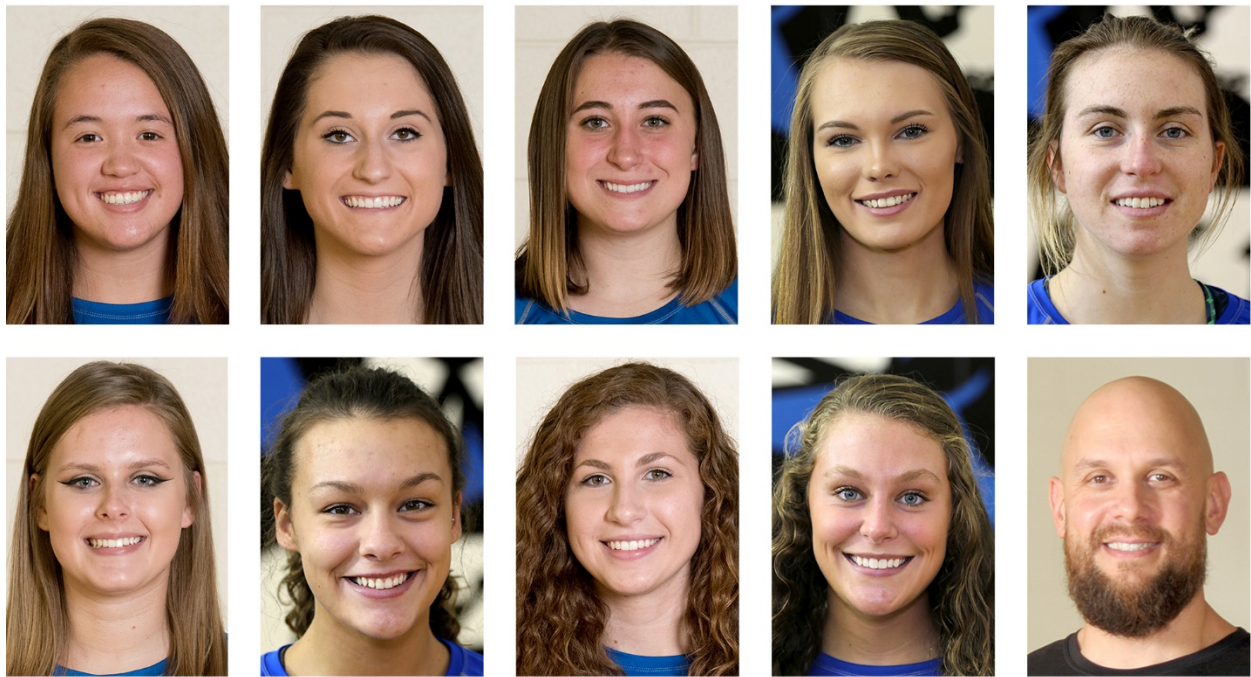


Spike in heavy hitters sets stage for BC3 volleyball team

Pioneers chase 10th consecutive winning season

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Members of the 2018-19 Butler County Community College volleyball team are, top row, from left, Emilee Beck, Haley Caldwell, Mackenzie Craig, Kaylee Ebbert and Bryanna Fedorchak. Bottom row, from left, Emily Magusiak, Makenzie McDowell, Madison Morella, Brooke Snow and coach Rob Snyder.

(Butler, PA) The Butler County Community College volleyball team's pursuit of a 10th consecutive winning season and fourth Western Pennsylvania Collegiate Conference title in a row may depend on a heavy-hitting front row that returns the league's top two players in kills per set.

The Pioneers, 18-6 in 2017, are also chasing their third National Junior College Athletic Association Division III Region XX crown in four years and ninth since 1999 under coach Rob Snyder.

"Our biggest strength this year," said Snyder, who has compiled a 356-121 record through 19 years, "is we have some really powerful hitters."

BC3 led the WPCC and tied for No. 1 in the NJCAA's Division III Region XX with 9.58 kills per set behind Mackenzie Craig and Emily Magusiak, who topped the Pioneers with 2.34 and 1.82, respectively.

Craig, of Karns City, had a team-high 180 kills in 2017 and Magusiak, of New Castle, was second with 142.

"The shorter we can keep the rallies, the more we think it is to our advantage," said Snyder, an eight-time WPCC coach of the year. "Especially in serve-serve. Our biggest goal is to sideout on the serve because we want to take away the other team's advantage. If they serve at us and we hit a hard ball back at them, that's the best way for us to be successful."

Morella "so powerful as a hitter now"

Craig and Magusiak were selected to 2017 all-tournament teams in the WPCC and in Region XX, where the Pioneers' hopes of a third consecutive NJCAA Division III Region XX title were dashed with a 15-13 loss in the fifth and deciding set of the finals to Howard Community College, of Howard, Md.

"They lost a really tight game and I think that makes them a little bit more fired up about it," Snyder said. "They know what it takes. They are already talking about Howard a little bit. I think that hunger helps a little bit."

Added Magusiak: "It was a rough game, but I think we are going to come back and be a lot better."

"We do not like losing," said Madison Morella, of Ellwood City, who with Haley Caldwell, of Butler, joins Craig and Magusiak in BC3 returning four of six starters.

Morella, hobbled for half of the 2017 season while recovering from a torn ACL in her right knee suffered during gymnastics in her senior year at Ellwood City, worked her way into BC3's starting rotation and finished tied for fourth on the team in blocks.

"She just worked so hard in the weight room and on her jump and her speed," Craig said of Morella. "She is so powerful as a hitter now."

Coach: "Winning is the standard"

Emilee Beck, of Butler, returns from a 2017 squad that won its ninth WPCC crown under Snyder and 14th since 1977.

By the numbers

Seasons in which the BC3 volleyball team won the Western Pennsylvania Collegiate Conference championship:

2017-18; 2016-17;
2015-16; 2010-11;
2006-07; 2005-06;
2004-05; 2003-04;
2002-03; 1998-99;
1992-93; 1982-83;
1981-82; 1977-78.

“I expect to be successful every season,” Snyder said. “I think it’s important to set high standards. Winning is the standard.”

Beck will be joined by freshmen Kaylee Ebbert, Mars; Bryanna Fedorchak, Mercer; Brooke Snow, Karns City; and Makenzie McDowell, Knoch.

McDowell and Craig will share time as setter following the graduation loss of Brittney Bianco, who in December was selected as the Pioneers’ sixth All-American under Snyder after ending her BC3 career ranked No. 2 in the program with 1,254 assists in 49 matches.

“Makenzie McDowell came in way better than I thought she was going to be, having not been a setter,” Snyder said of a back row player on a Knoch High team that in 2017 won the program’s first PIAA title and finished 24-0.

“She wants to set,” Snyder said. “I have started with players who were good players that did not have as much natural setting ability as she does.”

“Every year you want to build up”

Among 102 teams in NJCAA Division III in 2017, the Pioneers finished No. 11 with 3.13 service aces per set; No. 13 with 19.1 digs per set; No. 22 with 247 service aces; No. 23 with a .209 hitting percentage – and No. 24 with their 9.58 kills per set.

“A kill for is the best thing ever,” Craig said. “I think it tears the other team down. Every kill is like removing a building, block by block. The more you get, the more it takes away from them. What you take away from them, it gives to you.”

Added Magusiak: “I would hope the kill affects the other team’s confidence.”

No. 2 seed Eastfield College, Mesquite, Texas, beat top seed Harper College, Palatine, Ill., 3-1 in the NCJAA Division III national championship in November in Rochester, Minn. Columbus State, Columbus, Ohio, finished fourth after beating Howard 3-0 in the District G title game that followed Howard’s victory over BC3. Columbus State lost 3-2 in the Division III tournament to Central Lakes College of Brainerd, Minn.

The Pioneers open their season Aug. 31 by hosting Penn State-DuBois at the BC3 Field House, where the Pioneers in 2017 were 12-1. They face their first WPCC opponent, the University of Pittsburgh-Titusville, on Sept. 10, also at the Field House.

“Last year we had such a powerful team and we won the conference,” Craig said. “Every year you want to build up and get better. This year we want to win that conference and even try to surpass that.”