

Bianco becomes historic 3rd female All-American at BC3 in 2017

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(Butler, PA) Butler County Community College volleyball setter Brittney Bianco on Thursday was selected as a National Junior College Athletic Association All-American, and as the third female BC3 athlete to receive the prestigious post-season recognition in 2017 represents a first in the college's 52-year-history.

Bianco, of Freeport, recorded 633 assists in her sophomore season and finished her BC3 career with 1,254 in 48 matches, second only to Nicole Sebastian, who had 1,360 in 57 matches from 2002 to 2003.

Bianco's selection follows those in 2017 of BC3 softball outfielder Nicole Houk and of women's basketball forward Julia Baxter. The three BC3 athletes were the only Pennsylvanians among 62 NJCAA Division III All-Americans in volleyball, softball and women's basketball.

Bianco was one of 18 in volleyball; Houk, one of 22 in softball and Baxter, one of 22 in women's basketball.

BC3 had three NJCAA All-Americans in 1996 and in 2015 with three male athletes, and in 2003 with two male athletes and one female athlete.

"Another milestone for our No. 1 college," BC3 President Dr. Nick Neupauer said, referencing BC3's being named in 2017 as the No. 1 community college in Pennsylvania in back-to-back Schools.com surveys. "Sports and competition are the very fiber of Western Pennsylvania. Athletics have played an important role in our college's history, too. And now this incredible accomplishment. Congratulations to these three student-athletes."



Brittney Bianco, a Freeport Area High School graduate and setter on the Butler County Community College volleyball team, celebrates a point in a Sept. 27 match against Penn State-Beaver at BC3's Field House. Bianco on Thursday was named a National Junior College Athletic Association All-American.

Rob Snyder, BC3's director of student life and athletics, and its 19-year volleyball coach, said he too is "proud of the success of all the women's programs. Since I came to BC3 I have always believed in the potential of our women's athletic programs and in the past few years we have seen that realized."



Baxter, Houk BC3's first All-Americans in women's basketball, softball

Houk, of New Castle, finished with a .627 batting average that was higher than that of any player on the 350 squads in Divisions I and II – and in Division III of the NJCAA, in which BC3 competes.

Nicole Houk, New Castle Area High School graduate, became Butler County Community College's first National Junior College Athletic Association All-American in softball in 2017. She finished with a .627 batting average that was higher than that of any player on the 350 squads in Divisions I and II – and in Division III of the NJCAA, in which BC3 competes.

Like Baxter, Houk became the first All-American in her sport at BC3.

Baxter, of Butler, scored 582 points in 2016-17, ranked third in the NJCAA's Division III with 16.9 rebounds per game; fourth with 75 blocks; sixth with 25.3 points per game; and 12th with a 55 percent shooting average from the field. She became BC3's first women's basketball player to reach 1,000 points and ended with 1,070.

Bianco was selected as an honorable mention All-American, as was Baxter in April. Houk was a second-team choice in June.

"I hate losing. I hate it"

Bianco finished No. 15 in the NJCAA's Division III with 8.01 assists per set for an 18-6 BC3 team that won its third consecutive Western Pennsylvania Collegiate Conference title, ninth under Snyder and 14th since 1977.

"I believe statistics can only tell part of the story," Snyder said. "Brittney has the stats, but you have to watch her play to see that she has something beyond that, something indescribable you can't teach. ... I am very proud of the volleyball tradition we have built at BC3 and I couldn't be more happy for Brittney to earn this honor."

Bianco, BC3's sixth volleyball All-American and the program's first since Danielle Lloyd in 2011, said she thinks she "had a pretty good season overall. There are things I wish I could have achieved."

Such as becoming BC3's all-time leader in assists.

"That would have been cool," Bianco said. "I came in second to Nicole. If I could have played a little harder in that last game to make us, help us win ..."

BC3's season ended with 15-13 setback to top-seeded Howard, Maryland, in the fifth and deciding set of the NJCAA Division III Region XX championships Oct. 29.

"I hate losing," Bianco said. "I hate it. It's just a really bad feeling. I don't like to lose. That's with anything. Especially with volleyball."

Echoed teammate Mackenzie Craig: "That's probably the No. 1 thing that she hates. Losing. She knows how good she is. And she knows how good she can make a team."

Bianco against Howard had a career-high 49 assists, marking the 14th time in her BC3 career that she recorded at least 30 in a match.

"Brittney," Howard's Alana Matson said, "was amazing. She is good enough to play Division I. Her sets are that good."

Bianco knows "where to get the ball, what to do with it," Pitt-Titusville coach Vic Carr said after BC3 swept the Panthers Oct. 4 behind a 21-assist effort by Bianco on a night in which she also recorded five kills with deft deflections. "She has outstanding hands," Carr said. "Very instinctive. She can anticipate the ball. Some athletes have that special 'it,' and she has 'it' as a setter."



Julia Baxter, left, a Butler Area Senior High School graduate, became Butler County Community College's first National Junior College Athletic Association All-American in women's basketball in 2017. Baxter scored 582 points in 2016-17, ranked third in the NJCAA's Division III with 16.9 rebounds per game; fourth with 75 blocks; sixth with 25.3 points per game. She also became BC3's first women's basketball player to reach 1,000 points and ended with 1,070.

All eyes on the “threat”

When Bianco steps onto the court, opponents’ eyes “immediately go to her,” Craig said. “They know how good of a player she is. And they know that she is really the one who they are trying to beat. She is kind of the one who is keeping our team going, keeping us alive. When they see her, they see a threat.”

A threat, teammate Autumn Rodger said, who won’t give up.

“Not on a single point all throughout the season,” Rodgers said. “She went for every ball. She put 110 percent into every play.”

Because Bianco promised she would.

“I would tell them a lot,” Bianco said of her teammates, “that I would give them 110 percent if they gave me 100 percent.”

That, Craig said, “meant everything. If you have someone on the team, even if it is just one player, who has that type of attitude, it is going to change the whole team. And when she says 110 percent, I’d have to say it’s probably 120. That girl will do anything and everything to win.”

Kelly Kabay, Rodgers and Bianco were the only three returning players from a BC3 squad that in 2016 won 21 games against three losses – and Bianco was the leader.

“Any time I made a mistake, she was always the first one to say ‘I need you. Get back in this. You got this,’” Kabay said. “Whenever I would look at her, I would think, ‘Do it for the team, but do it for Brittney. She is counting on me.’ I know she would do anything for us.”

Bianco’s job as the quarterback of the squad, Rodgers said, was a big one, “and she filled that position perfectly.”

And with positivity, Craig said.

“That was a huge thing,” Craig said. “You can’t be a leader and be negative. She kept us alive, and put her body on the line and did everything she could to help us win.”

Houk, Baxter sparked championship seasons

Among Houk’s 52 hits in 83 at-bats in 2017 were 14 doubles, six triples and six fence-clearing home runs, which included two grand slams in the third inning of a 19-8 victory over the Community College of Beaver County on April 17.

Houk scored 51 runs and knocked in 43, accounting for 94 of 277 runs scored by a BC3 team that won its second WPCC title in a row and fourth overall, and captured its first NJCAA Division III Region XX title en route to a 20-5 finish.

Baxter led the women's basketball squad to a 16-9 record and its second consecutive WPCC title.

25 BC3 athletes All-Americans since 1970

In addition to 2017, BC3 has had three NJCAA All-Americans in 1996, 2003 and 2015. Matthew Heiges in golf, and Jerry Noll and Kevin Dill in men's basketball, were chosen as NJCAA All-Americans in 1996; Megan Smith in volleyball, and Nathaniel McCoy and Jason Kneidinger in men's basketball, followed in 2003; and Alex Alvarez in men's basketball and Thomas Dimun and Stefan Carlsson in golf followed in 2015.

Twenty-five BC3 athletes have been selected as NJCAA All-Americans, including two inducted in May into BC3's Charles W. Dunaway Pioneer Hall of Fame: cross-country runner Bob Wilson, BC3's first All-American in 1970 and the first to receive the honor twice; and volleyball hitter Missy Haney, who became BC3's first female All-American in 1999.

The NJCAA is represented by colleges in all states except Alaska, California, Hawaii, Kentucky, Maine, New Hampshire, South Dakota and Vermont.