

SENIOR SETS & SPIKES

Staff Writer: Hayley Griffith

Senior Danielle Newkirk has a love of volleyball that is undeniable. Newkirk has played volleyball since fourth grade at Mount Pleasant for fun, but started playing competitively in seventh grade and throughout the beginning of high school. Although she loves to play the sport, she recently moved to coaching instead of playing. Newkirk works at Grove Volley and Middle School North teaching young kids the technique and joy of playing volleyball.

"I moved to coaching last year. Two years ago I was thinking about it, but I didn't have enough time," Newkirk said. "So last year, after I got done from the previous year, I decided that I had time then and that was what I wanted to dedicate my time to."

Newkirk chose to switch from playing to coaching because she wanted to spend more time enjoying the actual sport and less of the competition itself.

"Playing here [at CG] was very competitive, and it was very difficult for me because I don't like being in situations where I am around people I know and I am trying my best but it isn't enough sometimes. I don't like that they are watching me, kind of judging me for it," Newkirk said. "So after the season was over I decided that I needed a break from playing in general so I started coaching instead. I love the sport itself, but I just wanted a break from the competition."

Grove Volley is a volleyball facility that allows young kids to come and learn to play volleyball. Newkirk found out about the opportunity through her former coach who is the head coach at Grove Volley.

"The program in itself is just like a bunch of first graders all the way up until eighth graders, which I'm sure that is going to change because the girls are getting older so we want to stay with them long enough to get them through high school with club," Newkirk said. "It is a program where it is just like a club season. The girls come in after they get done playing with school, and they start at the end of October and keep playing until the beginning of March. They also have a spring league, a summer league and summer camp where the girls just learn how to play and it is more of a skills thing."

Newkirk enjoys the program not only for the sport but also for the friends and experiences she has made through this opportunity. Although the experiences have been unique to Newkirk, the commitment became a reality for the young coach.

"The commitment is crazy now because of what it has taught me. It was a rude awakening at first because I actually had to be responsible, but now it

has taught me that I'm a good coach and I know what I am doing," Newkirk said. "It kind of opened my eyes as now I know the game better than when I started, and I have improved as a player and a coach knowing certain things in the game have to be a certain way or people on the rotations needs to be a certain way. I can see it better; I can visualize the game better and it is kind of made me a better person."

Newkirk has now had the opportunity to spread her love of volleyball to Middle School North where she helps coach the girl's volleyball team. Coaching has given Newkirk a new outlook on her past coaches that helped her learn everything she knows about the sport today.

"It makes me appreciate the coaches more for what they do, and it makes me forgive them (who are most of the time teachers) for what they

did not teach me to prepare me for high school. It also makes me want to help the girls more, giving them every bit of my knowledge for the game that I can so they are more prepared for high school than I was," Newkirk said.

While the young coach loves the sport, coaching at multiple facilities consumes most of Newkirk's time.

"I coach at North every day after school from three to five (for practice) and all night one to three days a week (for games). I coach at Grove Volley twice a week (Monday and Wednesday) from three to nine. On Monday I am coaching clinics and from seven to nine I am coaching my spring league team. On Wednesday I am coaching my 14s (14 being the age group) club team as well as helping other coaches with their teams when mine is not there. Also, for club and spring league we have one-day tournaments on Saturdays that normally take place at The Academy Volleyball Club. This happens every weekend in January and February, sometimes continuing into March. On weekends I get up around 5:30 a.m., get to the facility around 7 a.m., play all day, and then do not get home until around 5:30 p.m.

Usually these days are twelve-hour days. Most would say that is too much time, but in reality it is all worth my weekends," Newkirk said.

Although Newkirk does not compete competitively anymore, she wishes to see her love of volleyball shine through her players.

"I enjoy the role so much that I don't consider it a job. It is rewarding enough to see the girls when they start out, help them learn, fix mistakes, and expand on their potential. Then in the end, the girls are playing in a way they never thought they could. It is a way for me to give back to my community, shaping better volleyball players along the way," Newkirk said.

