

Hook, Line and Sinker

With Tony Hooker

Success on the volleyball court in the river city has been about as rare as a slice of leftover pizza in Hookerville. For the longest time, Villa Grove was at a decided competitive disadvantage because there were no youth programs, and so when our players took the floor as high school freshmen, they were already years behind their opponents. I remember how excited former coach Lydia Miller was when we formed the very first youth skills camp for 5th and 6th graders. She knew that it was crucial to the future success of the program. From those beginnings came the start of the junior high program 5 years ago.

And now, enter first year coaches John Woolley and Erin Pangburn. According to Athletic Director Noreen Acton, the regional championship trophy the seventh graders recently won was the first post season hardware earned by a Villa Grove Volleyball team at any level. Both coaches were kind enough to answer a few questions about themselves and their program as they prepped for their first round contest at the IESA state tournament.

1. How long have you been coaching at vgjh? What was your involvement with the sport prior to assuming this role?

(EP) This is our first year as the Junior High coaches. I coached most of these 7th grade girls the last two years in 5th and 6th grade rec.

I played on successful Tuscola High School teams a few years back. (smiles) I also played club ball for 3 years in high school.

(JW) This is my first year coaching, but have played volleyball in tournaments and leagues for nearly 30 years. I taught karate for many years, privately, in local schools, and

at Parkland College. 2. To what do you attribute this team's success? There have been lots of talented girls playing at VG, but none have reached this level. Why do you think this year's team has?

(EP) Most of these girls have been able to play for 3 years now due to the rec and Junior High programs. Our Junior High program is only in its 5th year, so previously girls have not had this advantage.

(JW) I believe that if a 7th grade team can serve, they can win. These girls, as a team, serve exceptionally well, and held many opponents to single digits in sets throughout the season with over 430 aces.

3. What is the team's strong suit?

(EP) The girls' main strong suit is that there is not a weak link. Everybody has something to bring to the court and they work well together.

They also have a mental toughness that I have not seen in any other team. They can lose the first set and come back ready to go in the second set.

(JW) See above.

4. What do you like to do when you're not obsessing about junior high volleyball?

(EP) I am in my 19th year of teaching at the Salt Fork School District. I also enjoy reading, gardening, and having new adventures with my husband and daughter.

(JW) I still try to play volleyball every week, year-round.

5. Anything you would like to add?

(EP) Every year and group of girls brings new challenges. We had a very small 8th grade group and a large 7th grade group made up of a lot of different ability levels and

experience on the court. Some people only associate success with playing time when in reality success in sports comes through countless lessons on and off the court. We encouraged the girls from the beginning not to compare themselves to the person next to them, but to strive to become a better version of themselves. I couldn't be more proud of all of the girls that made up our team for their growth on and off the court.

(JW) Of course we want to win, but we want to teach these girls to play the game to the best of each of their abilities and to continue to grow and be successful next year, and the year after that, and the year after that.

As everyone knows, success in junior high is no guarantee of future success, but with the memory of the long high school losing streak fading away, the development of strong grade school and elementary programs, and dedicated coaches like these two, I feel confident in saying that the program is trending upward at all levels, and that future success, like that elusive slice of leftover pepperoni that you stashed in the back of the fridge, will continue to taste oh so delicious.

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2019 VILLA GROVE/HERITAGE HAWKS BOYS BASEBALL SCHEDULE		record
Mar 11	SJO	
Mar 12	@ Marshall	
Mar 13	@ Salt Fork	
Mar 14	Urbana	
Mar 16	Paris	
Mar 18	@ Monticello	
Mar 19	@ Armstrong	
Mar 20	Sullivan	
Mar 22	@ Bismarck Henning	
Mar 26	@ Judah Christian	
Mar 28	Oakwood	
Mar 29	@ Arcola	
Mar 30	@ Blue Ridge	
Apr 01	ALAH	
Apr 02	LSA	
Apr 04	Georgetown Ridge Farm	
Apr 05	@ Martinsville	
Apr 08	@ Cumberland	
Apr 10	Oblong	
Apr 11	@ Fisher	
Apr 12	Tri-County	
Apr 16	Schlarman	
Apr 17	@ Hutsonville	
Apr 18	Arthur Okaw Christian	
Apr 22	Martinsville	
Apr 23	@ Tuscola	
Apr 24	Cumberland	
Apr 25	@ Oblong	
Apr 29	@ Tri-County	
May 04	Neoga (DH)	
May 08	Cerro Gordo	
May 09	ALAH	
May 11	@ Unity	

HEAD COACH Jason Conn

2019 VGH Girl's Track & Field Schedule

Mar 09	@ EIU invite
Mar 13	@ Uni High (Armory)
Mar 19	@ Arcola
Mar 26	@ Arcola
Mar 28	@ Tuscola
Apr 05	@ ALAH
Apr 09	@ Salt Fork Invite
Apr 12	@ Unity (girls)
Apr 19	@ Tuscola
Apr 23	@ ALAH
Apr 26	@ Monticello
May 03	@ Arcola (LOVC meet)

HEAD COACH Heath Wilson

2019 VILLA GROVE Blue Devils GIRLS SOFTBALL SCHEDULE		record
Mar 12	@ Mahomet Seymour	
Mar 13	@ Salt Fork	
Mar 14	@ ALAH	
Mar 18	Tuscola	
Mar 19	@ Unity	
Mar 20	Urbana	
Mar 21-24	@ Murfreesboro, TN	
Mar 26	Georgetown-Ridge Farm	
Mar 27	@ Argenta Oreana	
Mar 28	Windsor	
Mar 29	Okaw Valley	
Mar 30	@ Rantoul Tourney	
Apr 01	@ Cumberland	
Apr 02	@ SJO	
Apr 03	Tri-County	
Apr 05	@ Oblong	
Apr 08	Martinsville	
Apr 09	Champaign Centennial	
Apr 10	@ Hut-Pal (DH)	
Apr 11	@ Fisher	
Apr 15	vs Heritage	
Apr 16	@ Casey Westfield	
Apr 17	Cumberland	
Apr 18	@ Blue Ridge	
Apr 19	@ Tri-County	
Apr 22	Oblong	
Apr 24	@ Martinsville	
Apr 25	@ Arcola	
May 01	@ Heritage	
May 02	Armstrong-Potomac	
May 08	Cerro Gordo	
May 10	@ PBL	

HEAD COACH Heather VonLanken

2019 VGH Boy's Track & Field Schedule

Mar 13	@ Uni High (Armory)
Mar 16	@ EIU invite
Mar 19	@ Arcola
Mar 26	@ Arcola
Mar 28	@ Tuscola
Apr 05	@ ALAH
Apr 09	@ Salt Fork Invite
Apr 12	@ Unity (girls) M
Apr 19	@ Tuscola
Apr 23	@ ALAH
Apr 26	@ SJO (boys)
May 03	@ Arcola (LOVC meet)
May 11	@ Shelbyville

HEAD COACH Heath Wilson



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