

Hermiston's Ena inks with Centralia

Published: May 1, 2015 12:01AM



SAM BARBEE PHOTO Hermiston senior Noa Ena, flanked by her parent Eti (left) and Katelina, holds a volleyball and the letter announcing her intent to play for Centralia Community College next school year at her signing ceremony Thursday.

Hermiston outside hitter Noa Ena committed this week to play volleyball at Centralia (Washington) Community College.

Before the start of the 2014 volleyball campaign, someone asked Hermiston head coach Becky Wadekamper if senior outside hitter Noa Ena could play at the next level.

She said Ena could if she found the right team. Apparently she did. This week, Ena inked her intentions to play volleyball at Centralia Community College in Centralia, Washington, where she will join former Bulldog teammate Kim Nevil. The Trailblazers compete in the West Division of the Northwest Athletic Conference under head coach Susan Gordon.

For the Bulldogs, Ena was a leading force offensively, frequently leading the team in kills. She was also a leader on and off the floor, providing energy and laughs when they were needed, Wadekamper said.

"I'm grateful for this opportunity," Ena said Thursday at Hermiston High School. "I'm really excited and hope to do the best I can. I want to thank my parents for bringing the pain but pushing me to my best; my coaching staff — they're amazing; my family for being my support system; and I want to thank my Heavenly Father for this blessing and this opportunity."

Ena originally planned to attend Brigham Young University to prepare for her Mormon mission after deciding at the time she wasn't going to pursue a career in volleyball past high school. Then Centralia coaches, through Wadekamper, began expressing interest in the athletic outside hitter, and Ena changed her mind.

Ena faced one last hurdle, however. Because of Ena's faith, she observes Sundays as a holy day and she asked Gordon and staff if they practice or play on Sundays. If yes, it would be a problem. Luckily for Ena, however, the team takes Sundays off, giving Ena the answer she hoped to hear.

"I just felt like it was the right decision," she said of signing with Centralia. "Religion was a huge part ... Me and my family thought this would be a good place for me for the next two years."

That was in November. It wasn't until over spring break this year that Ena finally committed to Centralia, however. After weighing all the options, Centralia fit each criterion set by her.

It took Wadekamper some prodding to finally get Ena to open up about her decision. Wadekamper said Ena wouldn't come right out with it, and once she did, the now-retired coach was thrilled.

"(Wadekamper said), 'It's about time,' " Ena said, laughing.

"I was just real happy for her," Wadekamper said.

It also helped Ena that Centralia is of comparable size to Hermiston. As of 2010, Centralia had a population of just more than 16,000, making it a bit smaller than Hermiston. The city is roughly halfway between Portland and Seattle and is a short drive from the coast, as well. The four-hour drive played a factor, too, as Ena wanted to be far enough away to branch out but close enough to home to visit periodically.

"I think they're excited. They want me out of the house," Ena joked about her parents. "I think they'll keep saying that until graduation day."

Other than Nevil and Gordon, Ena won't know anyone in Centralia. It's not a situation that's foreign to her, however. Ena and her family moved from Stanfield her freshman year, and she described herself as a "hermit" in that first year.

It will be a similar experience in western Washington.

"I'm excited to meet new people," she said. "I don't like talking to new people, but I'm excited to learn that attribute and characteristic, but I'm excited to see who I will become later in life."

As a volleyball player, though, Ena is set up for good things.

"She just loves to learn," Wadekamper said. "She's a terrific athlete. She's gifted that way. She's very coachable, and she loves to learn new stuff and she's very competitive.

"I would fully anticipate her graduating from there and probably going on from there, even," Wadekamper added. "She's got a bright future and should be fun to watch her."

Coach recalls amusing moment with Ena

A few years ago, Wadekamper took her volleyball team to a corn maze in the Portland area. It was a haunted corn maze with various people dressed up in scary outfits with or without props to make it a convincing show.

Wadekamper said as the Bulldog volleyball players cautiously made their way around the mud-soaked maze, an actor with a chain-less chainsaw jumped out and scared Ena so badly that she dragged Wadekamper down into the mud with her.

As Wadekamper told this story at Ena's signing ceremony Thursday afternoon at Hermiston High School, the Centralia-bound outside hitter buried her head in her hands and periodically looked up with an embarrassed smile. Teammates giggled at the memory, and most all in attendance gave at least the slightest of chuckles.

That's the Noa Ena that Wadekamper and her teammates have come to know and will miss.

"Noa's a fun kid," Wadekamper said. "(I will miss) her smile, her sense of humor. She's a good kid."