Local ties breed Seahawks’ success

Several former SCCAL players help make Cabrillo the No. 2 team in the state

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Homesickness played a major role in Bria Morgan’s decision to move back home and attend Cabrillo College after a year playing for the University of Hawaii–Hilo, an NCAA Division II women’s volleyball program. On the court, she’d been a star for the Vulcans. Off of it, she’d felt like a fish out of water.

“I just wanted the sense of community and family that I knew would have at Cabrillo,” said Morgan, a 2012 Soquel High grad and that year’s Santa Cruz Coast Athletic League MVP. “I knew I would be coming back to open arms, to people who were ready for me to come back. That helped me make a quick decision to come back, personally.”

Little did Morgan know just how at home she would feel at Cabrillo. The 5-foot-11 outside hitter stands among eight Seahawks who hail from Santa Cruz County — half the team. Plus, after she committed to coach Gabby Houston-Neville, Morgan learned that two of her closest Main Beach Volleyball Club teammates had also left their four-year colleges to play for the Seahawks this season as well.

All together, they could be mistaken for a Santa Cruz County All-Stars squad. By the end of the season, though, they just want to be known as California junior college state champs.

“I knew we were going to kick ass, they were all so good,” Morgan said. “All the local talent we had here — we took the cream of the crop from the local talent we had around here.”

“I think we definitely have the potential to go to state.”

CABRILLO

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Houston-Neville, who just celebrated her 100th win in her fourth season at Cabrillo, said she always tries to recruit close to home. This year, though, she couldn’t believe the riches she was able to mine.

“I was like, ‘Wow, no way!’” Houston-Neville said.

From the Harbor High team that went undefeated in the SCCAL and reached the NorCal final last season, she nabbed Carly Craig, Morgan Matias, Breeanna Calhoun and league co-MVP Kelsey Shaver. They will be rejoined with former Pirates teammate Delanie Borek, a 6-foot sophomore outside. Cassie Covington, who at 5-5 earned Monterey Bay League Gabilian Division first-team honors as a middle, will join Calhoun as a redshirt freshman.

Then, out of the blue, came University of Pacific’s Maddy Call and UC Santa Barbara’s Alex Flores of Aromas. Both Call of Los Gatos and Flores of Aromas left their four-year colleges to play for Houston-Neville, who had coached them and Morgan on the Main Beach Ultras club team.

Now that she has it, the coach doesn’t want that talent to go to waste.

“We have some lofty goals,” she said. “We want to defend our conference title for sure. We have a really good chance to make it back to the final four, make it back to the state championship and ultimately win it all if we can. That’s the ultimate thing we want to do.”

The Seahawks have won the Coast Conference South title every year since 2007. Their first state championship since 1972, however, has eluded them.

They came out of the playoffs as the team to beat in 2010, becoming the first team to bump L.A. Pierce from the rank of No. 1, only to be knocked out of the final four on the first day. To their horror, history repeated itself in 2011. Last year, the Seahawks didn’t even reach the finals, finishing eighth in NorCal and 19th in the state.

But that’s all in the past. Cabrillo is undefeated heading into its conference opener Wednesday night against visiting Gavilan. That includes winning the Delta Classic, which usually is a harbinger of the best team in Northern California. With that win, Cabrillo shot to No. 1 in NorCal and No. 2 in the state in the California Community College Women’s Volleyball Coaching Association behind Grossmont out of El Cajon.

“I feel like there’s more determination on this team,” Borek said. “We just want it so much and feel like we have so much confidence in each other and trust each other that that’s what makes us so powerful.”

One of the consequences, intended or not, of having so many local players on the team is that they share a common history and connection rare among players at a two-year program. For example, Borek said she has known Morgan and Flores since she was 9. And somehow at Cabrillo, even the girls who haven’t been in the county all their lives seem to have folded seamlessly into the mix.

“The girls returning from last year and even the new girls who aren’t from Santa Cruz or this area specifically, we’ve just bonded so well,” Morgan said. “I’ve never been so close to every single member on the team. It feels like we’re best friends, and we’re not just making each other better players, but better people, at every practice.”

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