

Richardson is a Hit

Sophomore makes her mark on varsity

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Olentangy Liberty girls volleyball has been a very successful program. Last year they made it to states and just fell short getting runner up. This year they won the OCC and had an overall very successful season going 22-5. This team of seniors and juniors got a new addition this year, sophomore Elaina Richardson.

Richardson started playing when she was 12 years old. In 7th grade she decided to try out just for the fun of it.

“The only reason I made the team is because I was 5 ‘9” Richardson says. She has been playing ever since then. Her coaches and teammates have shaped her into the player she is today and says that Jennifer Chapman and Macy Winklefeus have made the biggest impact on her. Coach Chapman helped make Richardson into the player she is today by giving her the opportunity to play with varsity. Coach Winklefeus who was Richardsons 15’s season club coach helped her regain her love for volleyball and made her improve as a player, she also pushed her to take risks that she normally wouldn’t take during a game.

When her favorite season of volleyball started to come around, school volleyball she was very excited. Over the summer during liftings and scrimmages she immersed herself in JV and had not a thought in the world that she would

make varsity. After tryouts she got in the car with her mom and opened the letter. Her mom wasn’t paying much attention to her because they both assumed she was going to be on JV. When Richardson opened the letter and saw varsity she started freaking out. She called her dad and told him almost immediately. Her dad was in disbelief at first and didn’t believe her but once he did he was so happy for her.

Her nerves were through the roof for the first practice to not make mistakes and play well as she was the youngest on the team, she put a lot of pressure on herself to play good.

“I played terribly the first practice, I was so nervous.” Richardson says. As the practice went on she realized “everyone seemed so chill and laid back about it, it wasn’t as serious or harsh as I thought it would be.” But two of the seniors she looks up to, Claire Mrukowski and Gabi Moulten told her when she would make mistakes.

“it’s fine laugh about it, it’s not a big deal”. That one piece of advice helps her whenever shes burnt out on volleyball or just isn’t loving the sport anymore. Another piece of advice she lives by is the world will keep spinning.

“That’s what I always think when I think that somethings gonna be such a big deal” “No matter,



Richardson waving to fans before Jerome game. They beat Jerome. "I loved cheering and clapping for Elaina before games to help get her hype," Freshman Mindy Schoen said.

what everythings gonna happen like the world is not going to stop because of this one thing" Richardson says.

At the beginning of the season she was scared to make mistakes but as the season went on she got more and more comfortable with the team she got less scared to mess up.

One of the people she looks up to is current senior Nicole Russel because she's the middle. Richardson was very inspired.

"she came back from an injury and came back so strong and was still ready to be such a threat to another team" Richardson said "even though she was still half injured and she also committed while injured that's really impressive to me."

At the moment Richardson is not sure how far she wants to go with volleyball, but she wants to go to a bigger state school so she's thinking she will play on the club team.

Richardson's favorite favorite song to scream on the bus was *Zero to Hero* from Hercules and loved when *Knife Talk* by Drake came on in the locker room before games. Her favorite team meal was Panera. Throughout the whole season her favorite memory was beating one of Libertys biggest rivals Orange at home after they had lost to them previously at Orange. That game was the last game of the regular season so everyone was super happy



Richardson hitting the ball mid' game. She got a kill on it. "Watching Elaina get kills during school season was so much fun, the whole team would get so hype," Freshman Maddie Blankenship says.

to have won. The team was also super sad because after this game varsity was done practicing with JV and freshman teams. But overall it was just a really fun moment for everyone.

The junior class made the one of the biggest impacts on her as they took them in as one of their own despite the fact that they were a year older. The junior class consisted of Claire Ash, Avery Tokarski, Lauren Sackett, and A.C. Loftus. Richardson warmed up with Ash before every game.

Overall she had a great experience on varsity. She had a good time getting to know the girls and really feeling part of that kind of environment.

Some of Richardsons biggest takeaways from this season are if you really want something, never give up on it, and play for your teammates. One of her favorite parts of volleyball is her teammates. She loves traveling and spending time with them. Most of the time they can really make or break the experience. Sometimes you'll leave with new best friends and others you'll be so excited the seasons over and you don't have to see them again.

Richardson has worked very hard to get where she is today.

"I would tell younger players that your hard work pays off" Richardson says. "Every practice matters".