

Challenges, opportunities await Highland Christian's volleyball team

By [DANIELLE SZULCZEWSKI](#)

Arlington Times Sports Reporter

Sep 02 2009, 11:11 AM · **UPDATED**

ARLINGTON — [Highland Christian volleyball](#) took a few blows in the offseason.

For one, there was the graduation ceremony where more than one senior from last year's district tournament squad earned diplomas, a concrete reminder that their high school competition days were over. For another, the team transferred a player or two out of the district.

Already a small school that has lower enrollment this year than recent years due to families feeling the economic pinch, the Knights have eight girls out for a sport that requires six on the court at any given time. Moreover, the team lost every starter from last year's squad. On the other hand, the other small schools in Highland Christian's Northwest Conference face this problem fairly often, meaning inexperienced players who can pick up skills quickly can have an impact this season.

The Lady Knights have a backup returning from last year and boast a few more with general athletic ability that coach Anthony Favors hopes will translate to the court.

Sophomore Esther Brown will be in her third season with the team, a rare player who competed as an eighth-grader.

"She will be an excellent blocker and has turned into a good hitter," Favors said after practice. Brown, a sometime starter and contributor off the bench on last year's basketball team, is one of several players from that squad who are already well conditioned, something every player on this team will need to be out of necessity.

Another is Jade Olin, a junior and likely leader of this team as one of its oldest members. Favors expects another sophomore to jump into the program at setter, Sarah Tuemmler. Both were basketball teammates of Brown. After the girls' Aug. 31 practice, Favors said he likes what Tuemmler has picked up from recent grad and last year's setter Aly Hodges, who is helping with the team while commuting to Western Washington University for her freshman year of college.

"This was the first time I got to see her set. She has excellent hands," he said. "She never setted before, but she's a natural."

Despite some natural athleticism from the girls, Favors is pragmatic about the fact that the team has a steeper learning curve than many teams they'll face this season. League rival North Sound Christian boasts a strong returning class and institutional success. Grace Academy brings in a new coach this fall with Div. I credentials.

"The one thing that's going to be different is that we're not going to come and stomp anybody to the ground," Favors said. "We're going to have to claw and scratch every match."

With every player essential this year, the team is also increasing its focus on good nutrition and fitness.

But the season, like last year's or any other, is an opportunity. Favors is already enjoying one reward.

"The great thing is you see the girls develop," he said.

[Click here](#) for more photos.

Arlington Times Sports Reporter Danielle Szulczewski can be reached at dszulczewski@marysvilleglobe.com or 360-659-1300.