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# ‘They look up to her’: Senior libero Kyla Waltmire a hit from back row for Aurora Christian in two-game sweep of Harvest Christian

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Aurora Christian's Kyla Waltmire (3) returns a serve against the Harvest Christian during a match in Elgin on Wednesday, Sept. 1, 2021. (Mark Black / The Beacon-News)

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For a first-year coach like Aurora Christian's Mayra Johnson, having a do-it-all senior libero in Kyla Waltmire is quite the luxury.

"They look up to her," Johnson said. "She leads them from the minute they're in the locker room all the way out here. That's my expectation for her, and she's really taken that upon herself this season. She's a great leader."

She's also quite the contributor on the court. She led the Eagles with four kills out of the back row Wednesday in a 25-14, 25-22 victory over Harvest Christian.

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“She’s my libero who will attack in the back row,” Johnson said. “She’ll call for it. She’ll also make great passes.”

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Aurora Christian's Kyla Waltmire (3) returns the ball against the Harvest Christian during a match in Elgin on Wednesday, Sept. 1, 2021. (Mark Black / The Beacon-News)

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The strategy of setting a libero in the back row is unique to be sure, but Waltmire is up to the challenge.

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“We’re trying it out new this year,” Waltmire said. “I didn’t hit a lot last year. We’re finding new places to put the ball to catch the other team off guard and get away from the big block.”

Aurora Christian (2-3) jumped out to a 13-5 lead in Game 1 and never looked back. Sophomore middle hitter Jada Haymon had three kills in that game.

“She has a lot of potential,” Johnson said of Haymon. “I always tell her she’s so close. Sometimes it’s that self-confidence. Once she finds that, it will be amazing.”



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It was the most complete game Aurora Christian has put together in the young season, and it fired up the Eagles.

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“It was a lot of validation because we all worked so hard this summer,” Waltmire said. “Everybody has been putting so much work in, so to get such a fun, good win was amazing.”

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Harvest Christian (0-3) hung around in Game 2, largely due to the performance of Hayley Martin. The senior outside hitter, who committed to NCAA Division II Dallas Baptist just before the season, led both teams with 10 kills.

Martin had three straight kills as the Lions pulled even at 16-16. They could never wrestle away the lead, however.

“We just have to make sure we get her more balls,” Harvest coach Andy Kownacki said. “(Wednesday) was the most attempts she’s had.

“That’s been our biggest problem so far — getting the attempts. With Hayley being so dynamic, we need to get her more reps.”

Each game featured long stretches of mistakes by the Lions, which Kownacki lamented afterward.

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Aurora Christian's Jada Haymon (20) hits the ball past Harvest Christian's Ella Schoenberg (7) during a match in Elgin on Wednesday, Sept. 1, 2021. (Mark Black / The Beacon-News)

The second game was a lot better, showed a lot of fight. That was good to see.”

Johnson comes to Aurora Christian from coaching club volleyball, but she inherited only two seniors.

Wins like the one Wednesday will go a long way to showing the growth her inexperienced team has made in a short period of time.

“I didn’t know what to expect as a new coach,” Johnson said. “It was great to see them come out strong (Wednesday), and they were excited about it. There’s a lot to build on.

“This is what I know they can all do, and they can do more.”

*Paul Johnson is a freelance reporter for The Beacon-News.*

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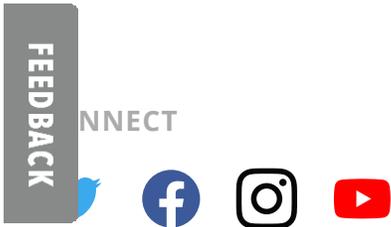
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