

Premier Volleyball has been at the center of my activities for more than just the eight years that I have been playing. Even before I was playing, I was watching my sister play for Premier. I remember that I couldn't wait until I got to be the one on the court and finally I tried out and made a team when I was 9 years old!

My fondest memories come in flashes...making my first team, Joe's Crab Shack, pool party in Lincoln, qualifying at Show Me, goodie bags, Casa Bonita (you have to go once, but ONLY once), Dick's Last Resort, qualifying for nationals, Mall of America, beating our rivals at President's Day, parasailing!, Maui Wauis. It's funny how half of the great memories seem to have something to do with food. I guess a volleyball team travels on its stomach, too.

I have two pieces of advice for younger players and those just starting out:

First, be a volleyball player, not a position. Take advantage of every extra session you can manage with your schedule. Even if you aren't a setter, go to setter training, if you are a setter, go to hitting sessions. Everyone who wants to play in the front row should go to Middles training. And absolutely everyone on the team should go to the defensive training. During my season playing on the 17 Gold team, I tried out and mostly played as a setter. But I also played right side in our regular rotation. And at some point during that year, I played in every position except middle, because that was what the team needed at the time. You may find at some point that another position is the only way you will see much time on the court. Or you might find that your team needs you in a different position to be more successful. In either case, having that extra training only makes you and your team the best it can be. If you define yourself as only one position, you are only limiting your own success.

Second, prepare yourself before tryouts for the possibility of not making the team you hope you will. And be okay with that. I've played on gold teams and on black teams over the years. I've found that some coaches are just looking for something I don't have. It's not personal. Each time I didn't make the team I hoped to, I became more determined to work hard and meet my goal the next year. When I made that goal, I became more determined to work hard for my team and to meet my goal for the next year. Keep in mind, your behavior when the teams are named at tryouts is the first impression you are going to make on your new teammates. In 2010, there were 3 age groups at Premier that qualified more than one team for Nationals. Just help your team get there — whatever team you are on.

Premier likes to say that it's like a family. I am here to tell you that it really is. The last memory that occurred to me as I considered my 10 + years in this family is a year that my sister and I were both playing. She had problems that year and ended up hospitalized for an extended period of time. Rick and Marian visited her at least twice during that period. Her team sent her cards and packages and when she was ready to come back, they welcomed her back with open arms. That is what is really important, and in the end, that is what I remember.

"I know that this is a hard time right now, but just because you weren't picked doesn't mean that you aren't good players," said Rick Welch after the 16 Gold and Black teams had been chosen. I was an alternate for 16 Black and that's how my career with Premier began.

I don't remember how long I waited in that gym, but I remember the nerves, the anxiety, and the self doubt that I would ever play volleyball at this level. 'Am I good enough to continue on in volleyball? Do I deserve a spot on the team?' These questions raced through my mind and just when I had almost given up on ever hearing my name called: "Kim Rogers could you please come over here for a moment?" I had made it onto the 16 Black team and I was so excited that I was going to play for Premier.

. First impressions aren't always my strong point. Many times, coaches simply look at me and think 'She doesn't look like a volleyball player. She doesn't even look athletic.' I've always had to prove myself. However, once practices and games began, the coaches always seemed to be surprised by how good and how outgoing I actually was. This girl, who had to work extremely hard to show what she could do, ended up playing for almost every minute of every match. Although I had proven myself to them, I hadn't proven that I was good to myself yet.

I was never self confident in my abilities. My family and friends would tell me, "You did great!" And I would always say, "Really?" I couldn't remember the great saves I had or how many serves I had gotten an ace on; I could only remember the ball I shanked, or the spikes that went out of bounds. But as I played and practiced with Premier, I could see a change in my confidence and my abilities. I was passing better and my spikes were landing in, and for the first time, I felt that I deserved to play.

Next year tryouts for the 17 teams came along and I was feeling confident. Then the announcement of the teams came out. I was nervous, but I felt that I had given it my all. And when the names were read, I was called first. I had gone from being an alternate to being chosen first for 17 Gold! I ran over to my parents and they told me they were so proud. Again, that year I played almost every minute of every match, I was a captain, and my self confidence had never been higher.

After an awesome high school season, tryouts for 18s came along and again I felt ready to play. I wasn't called first this time and I wasn't on 18 Gold, but I did make 18 Black, and I was so excited that I got to play another season. After a few practices had gone by, the coaches called each girl over to have a talk with her and tell her what her role was on the team. When I was called up, I was a little nervous, but I went up, smiled and the coach told me, "You are one of our most consistent players." I had never heard that from any coach. I was named one of the captains of the 18 Black team and this once shy little alternate had become a captain and "the most consistent player on the team." So when games would end and my parents would tell me that I played great, I would say, "I know!"

Premier really helped me gain confidence in myself and that was reflected in my playing. Without Premier, I would still be a shy 16 year-old alternate, asking if I had really played great, if I deserved to play, and wondering if I was good enough. Thanks to Premier and its coaching staff, I am proud, ready, and excited for my next step in volleyball. I am a great and confident player and don't ever need to think otherwise again.

Playing for Premier Volleyball Club over the last seven years has given me so many memories and has provided me the steps to mature and grow into a well-rounded young adult. I have made so many long-lasting friendships, had so many great coaches and appreciate the genuine interest shown in me by Rick and Marian.

Some of my fondest memories include traveling with the teams I played on. None can come close to this last year where we had a dance party in the middle of the hotel hallway in Colorado. I will sure miss the tradition of getting a picture with my teammates in front of the Blue Bear or with robot man. This year on 18 gold, we had a mascot, a shark. We got a stuffed shark at Cabelas, named him Stanley, and he sat on our bench. Mike said he didn't really like him, but on the bus ride home from Minneapolis, he was actually snuggling with him. Another good memory is going to practice to get together with your teammates from many different schools and playing the sport you love together. There is always a good laugh to come from 9 girls at practice. There were so many times that I would just fall to the floor laughing a teammate made a silly comment or made a funny face. It's the small things in life that make you laugh that I will always remember. Of course, playing volleyball at tournaments, qualifiers and nationals is what it was really all about. I had a lot of fun on the court too. While on the court, it was important to be focused but sharing a laugh with a teammate took the pressure off.

While playing at Premier, I learned a lot from my coaches, not just volleyball skills but also how to be a teammate and good sport. These I will carry with me through my entire life and can apply them to just about every situation. I always had coaches that wanted the best for me. They taught me that working hard would have benefits on the court. I was always a player that was extra hard on my self and my coaches over the years helped me teach myself to let my mistakes roll off my back. As a setter, I also learned how to be a leader on the court and how to provide encouragement to the rest of the team. When you play club, you learn to manage your time well. I balanced school, club activities and a job. This will be a skill that I will need *as an* adult. One of the most important lessons that I learned throughout my Premier career is to have respect for others. This includes my teammates, my coaches, my parents and the opponent.

Premier has become a second family for me. There are so many adults that I could go to any time I need to discuss a problem. First there is Rick and Marian. Rick was always there for me for advice and to push me to improve. It was only natural, that when I was offered a scholarship to play volleyball in college, that I talked it over with him right away. Marian is like a second mom. She even made me spaghetti and brought it to practice one night. I know I can always go to her for advice too. Heidi and Joe Oetken also played an important role in my growth as a volleyball player. They were the first coaches that really pushed me to have a positive attitude on the court and to forget about my mistakes. The friendships that I have developed with my teammates over the years are very special. I know many of them will be life-long friendships.

My advice for any future player considering club volleyball is that they cannot go wrong with Premier. The club director and coaches are all caring and knowledgeable about volleyball. Premier is a great club to play for and you will always be accepted by everyone who has played with the club or is coaching. Premier has been apart of my life for so long that I am hopefully coaching for them this coming club season and will be able to teach the younger girls the qualities that past coaches have taught me.