

Senior Charlie Van Etten was a record setter for H-F volleyball

BY DAVID P. FUNK
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Volleyball fits Charlie Van Etten. For the Homewood-Flossmoor graduated senior volleyball was where his natural talents and body type -- he's 6-foot-4 with long limbs -- allowed him to succeed most. The pace of the game was attractive to him, as well. "I kind of just play for fun, honestly," Van Etten said. "It's not an individual sport. We have to play as a team. As good as I am, we have to play together. One person won't make the team. I like that, coming together to make a team." He started playing organized volleyball in middle school, but he didn't really take the sport seriously until his sophomore season. He only began playing club volleyball as a junior. Maybe the biggest role Van Etten



Charlie Van Etten

played for the Vikings was defense -- a middle hitter responsible for blocking at the net and protecting the back row. He broke the school record for blocks each of the last two seasons with 44 last

year and 80 this season.

Coach Mark Ciesielski calls him "a force" on defense with his natural court savvy and instincts.

"You can't teach height. He's got the build, he's tall and lanky. There's structure to him," Ciesielski said. "Maybe he didn't have the technique and everything right away but he was a competitor. You knew he was going to be something later on."

Van Etten was the only returning starter this season, so there was a gap to fill. But his passing skills also made him an asset in the back.

It's unusual for a middle to do that. Even the Marian coaches complimented Van Etten on it after the Vikings played the Spartans.

"I can't remember ever having a middle go all the way around," Ciesielski said. "His passing is No. 1 or No.

2 on our team, and I can't take a passer out. He passes and follows his hits sometimes, which is very uncanny for a middle, but he does it. I don't know where we would have been without his passing, too. It's really important for us."

Club volleyball taught Van Etten some of those skills. It opened his eyes to some of the nuances of the game, such as reading little things like where fingers and hands suggest a ball might go so he can put himself in smart spots.

He's got 146 kills, 181 digs and 21 aces this year.

He had the opportunity to play small college volleyball but instead will go to the University of Illinois to study business with the hopes of working in marketing or sales. Club and beach volleyball will still be part of his future.

Parker boys track team stands on podium as state 8th grade champs

BY DAVID P. FUNK
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The Parker Junior High 8th grade boys track team secured the program's first-ever Illinois Elementary School Association Class 4A state championship May 24 at East Peoria High School.

Myles Ellis was a two-time champion, winning the 400-meter dash and running the 1,600-meter relay with Caden Dixon, Kourtney Smith and Jamir Ratliff.

Parker athletes were on the podium after five other events, as well.

Ellis, the team captain, also was third in the 110 hurdles and with the 800-meter relay team. His 54.43 in the 400 may be a school record. The 1,600-meter relay team's 3:47.62 might be, as well.

They're at least the fastest times at Parker since 2015, the furthest back on-

line records go.

Coming into the meet, Ellis was expected to win the hurdles but only place in the 400. Coach Joe Butler said after Ellis finished a disappointing third in the hurdles race, he saw something in his star athlete's body language.

Ellis came from behind to take both the 400 and as the anchor in the 1,600 relay. He donned a Superman cape after the meet.

"After the hurdles, I told myself I wasn't leaving without an individual state championship," he said. "I like to chase. I like to see who's in front of me and chase them down at the end. It's pretty fun."

"We had one regular season full meet. We had a lot of rainouts, and I was concerned that we wouldn't be battle tested," Butler said. "A kid like Myles, he makes sure he's ready, and he makes sure that



Provided photo

The Parker Junior High 8th grade boys track team won the Class 4A state championship at East Peoria High School.

his teammates are ready."

Stephen Brown was another key to the Falcons' big day. In only his third-ever long jump, he flew 20 feet, 4.75 inches

to finish second. That's another possible school record.

At sectionals a week prior to state, Brown went from 13 feet to 19 feet, Butler said.

Brown also finished fifth in the 200-meter dash and sixth in the 100-meter dash.

Butler said he knew he had the kind of team that was capable of winning a state championship after last season's sectional. Ellis ran with the 8th grade team and competed well. Ratliff, a talented distance runner, also showed promise. Throw in a few other athletes, like Brown, and the recipe was there. "It feels amazing. We had a great group of kids, great student athletes and it felt good to see the potential become reality," Butler said. "We had some hiccups along the way but to put it all together and grab a state title was pretty amazing."

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