

KMHS spikers enjoy another SWC 3-A crown

Story and photos by Gary Stewart

Despite making an early exit from the state 3-A playoffs, Kings Mountain High's volleyball team enjoyed one of its most successful seasons under veteran coach Dianna Bridges this fall.

The Lady Mountaineers compiled a 21-6 overall record and won their second straight Southwestern 3-A Conference title with a 14-0 mark. The Mountaineers have been unbeaten in conference play for over two years and they have won seven conference titles in 11 seasons under Bridges, who has a 169-54 record.

Kings Mountain fell to Canton Pisgah of the Mountain Athletic Conference 15-12, 15-8, 9-15, 16-14 in the opening round of the state playoffs Wednesday night at the KMHS gym. Kings Mountain also fell to a MAC representative, Smoky Mountain, in the third round of the state last year. Smoky Mountain went on to win the state title.

"We had a good team effort. Everybody played extremely well, but we just didn't match up against them," Bridges said. "They didn't attack the ball and we didn't have anything to block."

Holli Hollifield, an All-Conference standout and one of six seniors on the team, said the loss wasn't a matter of Kings Mountain having a bad game but that Pisgah was a "scrappy team. They dug up everything we hit at them," she said.

Hollifield and senior Charity Moss were the only four-year performers on this year's team, and they will be missed along with three other seniors who joined them on the All-Conference team - SWC Player of the Year Karen Queen, Christy Bridges, and Erica Randle, and April Putnam who didn't make All-Conference but was All-SWC Tournament. The Mountaineers will also lose foreign exchange students Daniela Dereggi and Elisabeth Tiasinga.

"Those are our top eight players, but we have enough people coming back to give us a good shot at winning the conference for a third straight season," Coach Bridges said. "We have a good nucleus. Everybody on this team played enough to letter."

Catie Brannon, Jessica Koeger, Katie Benton, Tammy and Tina Welch and Patricia Freeman will be joined on next year's team by a number of players from a JV team which finished 9-0.

Coach Bridges and her players have differing ideas on the key reason for the Mountaineers' success this year. The coach said it's because of the hard work and talent of her players. The players say it's the hard work and coaching ability of Mrs. Bridges.

"Team unity is our big strength," said Coach Bridges. "The girls really understand the team concept and they pull for each other. That, and they talent that they have were why we were so good."

Moss and Hollifield echoed those thoughts. "When we would lose we would stay up," said Moss. "When people made mistakes we just shook it off and got right back at it. We always played our hardest," said Hollifield.

"Mrs. Bridges taught us a lot about the game of volleyball, but more than that about the game of life," Moss said. "She was always there for us. Every year the team was like family."

"This year especially," said Hollifield.

"We were like sisters," added Moss.

Moss and Hollifield saw steady improvement in the program over their four-year association with the team. Their freshman year the Mountaineers finished third in the conference - the only time during Coach Bridges' tenure that a KMHS team has finished lower than second.

The experience the duo gained that year - and the addition of others who would become three-year performers - helped the team improve to a second place finish their sophomore year, then back-to-back championships as juniors and seniors.

"We worked hard," said Hollifield. "We went to the N.C. State volleyball camp for four years in a row, as did the majority of the players on the team. A lot of us also played year-round volleyball."

As they graduate and look back on their high school days, both Hollifield and Moss said volleyball will be the thing they remember the most.

"It was the best experience of our high school years," Hollifield said.

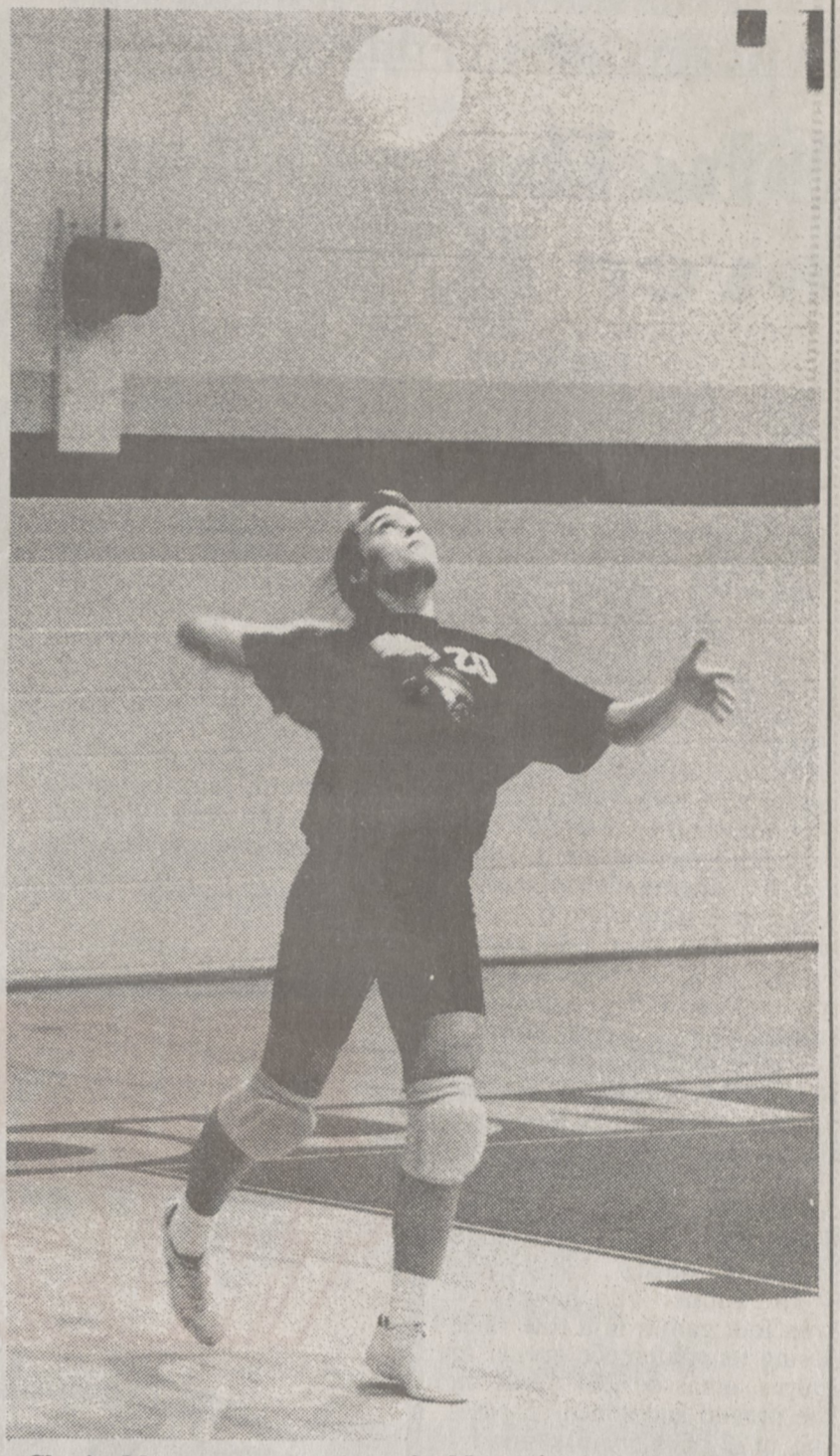
Both are interested in playing college volleyball but will probably be walk-on players. Moss plans to attend Appalachian State and Hollifield is leaning toward UNC-Chapel Hill or Davidson.



Christy Bridges keeps one from going over her head



SWC player of year Karen Queen performs well



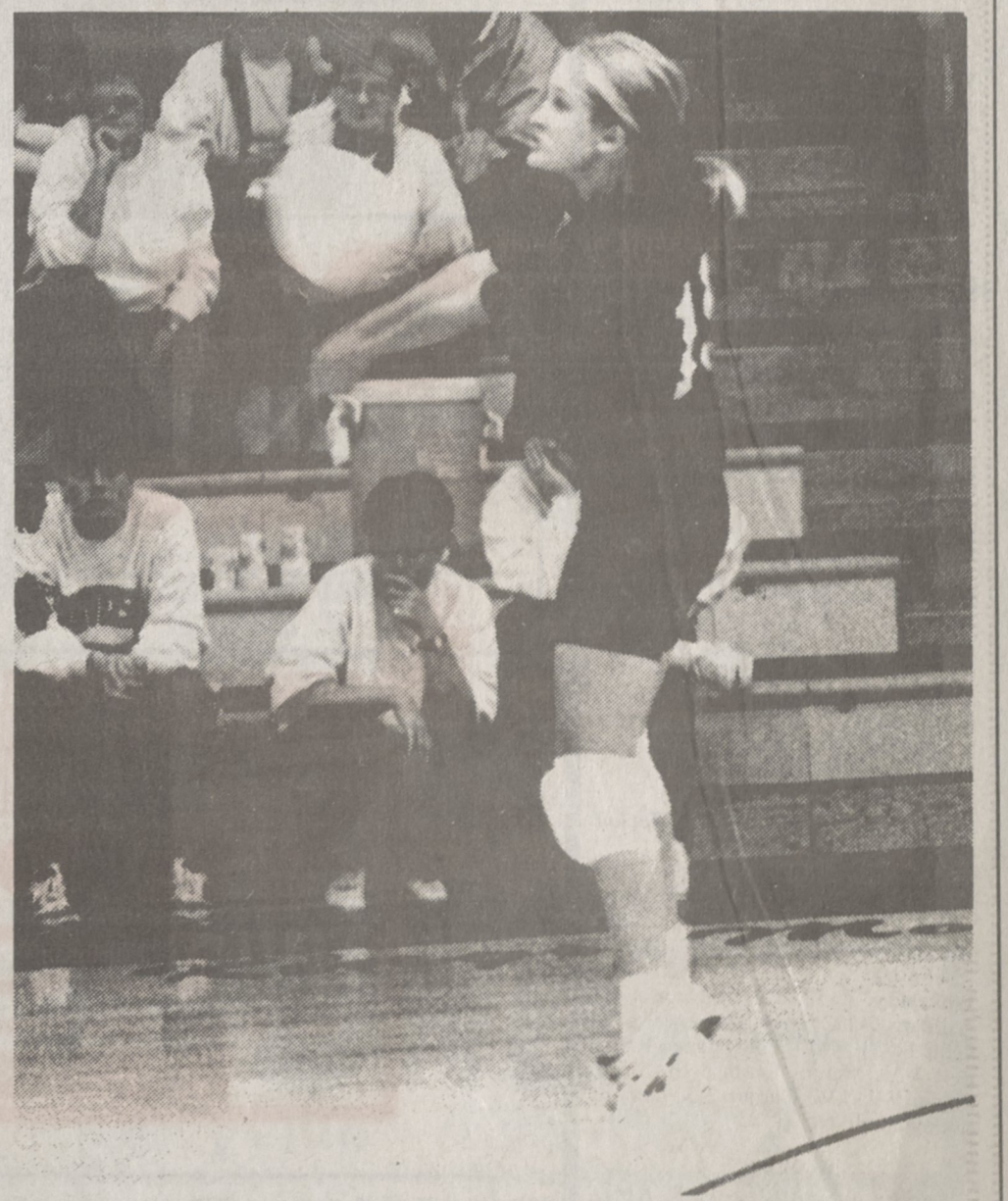
Charity Moss serves up a winner for Mountaineers



Christy Bridges strong around the nets



Foreign exchange student Daniela Dereggi strong in middle for KM girls volleyball team



All-Conference star Holli Hollifield was four-year performer