

August 24, 2026

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SportsTone.net

ASHEBORO - One of the constants of high school athletic programs is that players will graduate every season, meaning other players must step in and provide leadership on and off the court.

Some years, the loss of contributing players from the previous season are just too much to overcome and a program must take a step back, reload and once again work to become a factor in competing for a conference championship.



The Asheboro High School varsity volleyball team lost an incredible amount of talent from a team that finished 18-8 and advanced to the second round of the NCHSAA state 6-A playoffs last season, but reloading and waiting for this year's team to gain valuable experience isn't in head coach Kelly Smith's vocabulary. This team is already set to make a lot of noise this season.

Despite losing a number of standouts, the Blue Comets are off to a fast start with a pair of three-set sweeps over Wheatmore, a sweep of Eastern Randolph and a five-set



Blue Comets Maliyah Brady (2) and Cora Little (12) following a recent Asheboro win.

win over Ledford. The nonleague schedule gets even rougher this week with games against Trinity and Uwharrie Charter Academy.

Asheboro isn't shying away from anyone as the Blue Comets also have two nonleague matches with UCA, two against Southwestern Randolph and two against Randleman. SWR and RHS were among the state's top 4-A programs last season.

"It starts with those girls that graduated prior," Smith said. "They set a culture and a standard that all the girls try to meet and achieve. Even last year, you saw it on the floor and it carries over to the next year where those juniors were ready to step up and lead our freshmen and newcomers. Their

leadership is so big and our culture is where it needs to be where everyone excels. They are working hard in practice and pushing each other every day."

Smith enters her fourth year as the head coach of the volleyball program, a program she quickly turned around in her very first season. AHS was 7-17 in 2022, the year before Smith took the reins. Since, the Blue Comets have finished 14-11, 19-7 and 18-8 and with their 4-0 start this year, Smith has recorded a 55-26 record as the AHS head volleyball coach.

"It started with that group we had the first year," Smith said. "They were supportive and encouraging. They started the building blocks and it's just grown from there."

This year, the Blue Comets are balanced up front with Maliyah Brady, Cora Little, Madeline Hodge and Adalynn Scherer capable of taking over games at the net. Roxanne Davis, a junior transfer from Eastern Randolph, provides plenty of talent and valuable depth.

Kailey Brown, Lily Hunt and Lydia Searce are all key performers and Haley Macon will provide leadership as well. Those players become even more important as the Blue Comets wait for an injured Emma Ingold to fully recover from an injury.

"Cora and Ady have both stepped up to playing six rotations and meeting the challenge of playing the back row," Smith said.

Both saw plenty of action last season, but Little, a sophomore, will step into a starting role.

"For me, it's just go out and have fun," Little said after the sweep over ER. "Obviously, there will be a little pressure being a starter, but you get used to it and it's a lot of fun."

Davis is set to have a breakthrough year. One of the most athletic players in the county, she has settled in nicely in her new environment.

"She was a very happy surprise, we got her late in the summer," Smith said of her newest player. "The first week, she was pretty shy and then she jumped right in and that speaks to the culture we built here. These girls support one another and feel comfortable to encourage one another to reach their peak potential."

Potential that should lead to another very successful season for the AHS volleyball program.



Ady Scherer (20) and Kailey Brown (3).