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ASHEBORO - Most high school coaches depend a great deal on their senior class. These are the student-athletes who have experienced the most, can share knowledge and provide leadership to younger members of the team.

But when that senior class consists of just one player, a whole lot of responsibility falls on that one player.

Uwharrie Charter senior volleyball player Dacia Lowery has been filling that role admirably for the Eagles. On and off the floor, Lowery has given coach Lee Kennell exactly what he needs in order for UCA to reach its potential this season.

UCA, the No. 5 seed which defeated Eastern Randolph in three straight sets Saturday to advance to the second round of the state 1-A tournament, improved to 16-7 overall and will host No. 21 Hayesville Tuesday. Lowery will once again be a key player.



*Uwharrie Charter Academy senior Dacia Lowery. Photo by PJ Ward-Brown Photography.*

"We lost a lot of seniors last year and she has worked on taking that role and embracing that role," Kennell said of Lowery, who was strong at the net once again against ER Saturday. "In the past, she has always been super quiet, timid and shy. This year, she has really come out of her shell. She is a super smart girl and super talented."

A four-year performer for the Eagles, Lowery said this year has been quite different for her.

"It was very weird," Lowery said of being the only senior on the team. "Last year, we were very senior heavy. I never had to step up and be a leader. Now I feel I am a leader and they all look up to me and it's a big role. It's different, but it's a good thing."

Lowery said she has learned when things aren't going as planned, to make sure you "fail forward."

"In past years, when you mess up, it's like, 'OK, whatever,'" Lowery said. "Now they are watching me

and I had to learn to adjust, go to the next point, be a good role model for them."

Being the only senior means more responsibility and Lowery has embraced that challenge.

"Just being a good teammate is our biggest focus," Lowery said of her most important message to the team. "Every single game, whether you are having the best game of your life or the worst game of your life, it's important to be a good teammate and lift your teammate up. You never know what they are going through. If you just give them a high-five or lift them up in some way, that will help them and in turn will help you and the team."

Lowery has consistently been one of the top net players for the Eagles and her blocking ability has helped key many victories.

UCA was the top 1-A team in the tough Piedmont Athletic Conference and playing teams like defending 2-A state champion Southwestern Randolph, Randleman and Providence Grove has the team ready for state tournament action.

"Coach always says you won't see a team like Southwestern Randolph, a team that is so fast and quick," Lowery said. "We have such a good, competitive conference. Any team can show up and beat any team on any given day. It prepares you to be mentally tough every single game."

Lowery and the Eagles are going to have to show that mental toughness as they trek through the state tournament.

So far, so good.