

HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS' VOLLEYBALL NOTEBOOK

Powered by Julie Hall's motor, Central Catholic girls' volleyball is churning out wins

By **Julianna Schwindt** Globe Correspondent, Updated September 19, 2025, 3:00 a.m.



A major presence at the net, junior hitter Julie Hall has fueled a 6-1 start for the Central Catholic girls' volleyball team. DANIELLE PARHIZKARAN/GLOBE STAFF

Even at a Central Catholic girls' volleyball practice, **Julie Hall** dives for balls. While other players might let a tricky ball go, Hall never does.

Central Catholic coach **Alana McNeil** remembered a time when the 5-foot-8-inch junior hitter went after a ball, full-sprawl, into the stands in the middle of a game.

“She pulled the ball back into the court and we were able to play,” said McNeil. “She just got up and it was like nothing happened. She definitely is willing to sacrifice her body to save the ball.”

In sixth grade, Hall started playing club volleyball at Mill City, based in Lowell, where she resides.

“I really liked it when I first picked it up, and I quit all my other sports,” Hall said. “You have to play as a more cohesive team. Like other sports, players can do everything themselves. You need a team in order to play volleyball.”

McNeil was impressed by Hall and her fellow freshmen at tryouts. It was a talented class made up of players with years of club experience.

“Julie just stood out with her willingness to do whatever the team needed,” McNeil said. “Even as a freshman, [I noticed] her versatility as a player.”

Hall made the varsity that year. But there was a catch. She'd have to change positions.

On her club team, Hall plays setter and right side. McNeil made the decision to place Hall at outside hitter, an uncommon spot for a lefty.

“I was a little mad at first, but then after I started playing it I'm like, ‘Wow, this is so much better than setting and playing right side,’ ” Hall said. “You get to do more fun things, and I really like passing.”



Julie Hall is a rare lefthanded outside hitter. DANIELLE PARHIZKARAN/GLOBE STAFF

At first, Hall felt her new position was much harder than playing right side.

“A lefty on right side, you have the ability to approach the same way and swing line versus swinging cross, and no one can really tell where you’re going,” Hall said. “On outside, it’s a little more obvious where you’re swinging, because I have to approach straight from the inside of the court so that my arm isn’t outside of the antenna.”

Junior **Madison Blanchet** started playing at Mill City with Hall when they were in middle school. Blanchet switched to a different club after her 13U season, and the two went their own ways. Blanchet was shocked, and excited, to see Hall at Central Catholic her freshman year, because she had always valued her as a teammate.

Blanchet sees Hall’s unique position for a lefty as an advantage.

“I think it’s more difficult to block her,” Blanchet said. “Because her arm is all the way over there, they tend to just be blocking where they think a righty would be. And she just goes right past them.”

At 6-1, Central Catholic is off to its strongest start in memory. It has a lot to do with the chemistry of the team and the fact that the juniors have been together since freshman year.

And Hall, an all-Merrimack Valley Conference first-team selection as both a freshman and sophomore, is seen as a leader.

“She’s really loud and she’s super, super aggressive,” Blanchet said. “Like ever since freshman year, she was the loudest on the court.”

Hall also leads by putting her teammates in positions to score and allowing them to shine.

“She’s definitely the engine out there,” McNeil said. “Volleyball is a game of ups and downs, and momentum changes in a heartbeat. She does a fabulous job on the court of pulling us back to wherever we need to be, kind of like our equilibrium.”

Now, for the first time since Hall started at Central Catholic, the team has a shot at a championship.

“I just want us to come together as a team and be able to move on from mistakes. In the past, we’ve dwelled on them I think a little too long, and it’s cost us big runs or sets,” Hall said. “This year, we’re going to be getting a lot better as players, so we just need to mentally stay strong.”

Set points

- **Lexi De La Cruz** orchestrated a near-perfect spring season to [win the Division 1 state championship with the Brookline boys’ team](#). Now, he’s coaching girls for the first time

other than a brief stint at the club level.

With [a gritty five-set win in Natick](#), his debut at Wellesley is off to a strong start, entering Thursday's action with a 4-2 record.

"I don't know any teams, and I haven't coached [girls at] club in five years, so this is a new wave of girls," he said.

De La Cruz is hoping his coaching will get stronger later in the season when he faces Bay State foes a second time. He's glad there are fewer expectations on him this season.

"The game is different [compared to boys], the way I provide my feedback is different," he said. "Mainly I am happy this year compared to my last season with Brookline boys that I have a team I am able to work with and reach places they're not expected to be."

• **Soley Rodriguez Martinez** recorded eight kills, three assists, and an ace, along with stellar defense for Canton in [a loss to Oliver Ames on Wednesday](#). The star 5-foot-11-inch junior, already a two-time Globe All-Scholastic selection at libero, is rotating as a right side, providing anything and everything for the Bulldogs (5-2) out of the left back.

Matches to watch

Friday, No. 7 Chelmsford at No. 5 Andover, 5 p.m. — The last undefeated teams in the Merrimack Valley square off, with Jessie Wang (Andover) and Kyra Ward (Chelmsford), two of the most electric hitters in the state, in the middle of the action.

Saturday, No. 11 Franklin at No. 12 Bishop Feehan, 12 p.m. — A balanced Shamrocks offense tests its undefeated record against a strong group of returning starters with a new coach looking for a signature win.

Wednesday, Weston at Wakefield, 5 p.m. — Quite a few players who squared off in the Division 3 second-round matchup last season are back for the rematch. Though, Wakefield has moved up to D2.

Correspondent AJ Traub contributed to this story.

[Show comments](#)

©2025 Boston Globe Media Partners, LLC