

Siblings sharing volleyball success

BY RYAN PYETTE
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They're brother and sister. They're blocker and spiker.

They're rookies on Western's men's and women's volleyball teams and even ex-lab partners.

Despite a five-year age gap, St. Marys siblings Dan and Erin Miller are sharing similar experiences these days.

"It's interesting," said six-foot-six Dan, a 23-year-old mature student and middle blocker for the 15-5 men. "It's the first time Erin and I have been in the same school together. We're in the same program and she's even in three of my classes."

"He's in three of *my* classes," insisted six-foot Erin, 18, a right-side hitter for the 18-1 women. "And yes,

we sit beside each other. We were lab partners last semester. At first, people think we are twins, but he is definitely five years older than me."

After playing some volleyball in high school, Dan Miller earned a diploma from Fanshawe College and spent the past couple of years working in a factory.

"I came back to Western because of the factory job," he said. "I didn't want to do that forever. With volleyball, I was basically a walk-on. I hadn't played since high school. Hockey was always my main sport, but I play some beach (volleyball) and (Western coach) Jim Sage saw me in the summer and told me about tryouts in the fall."

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FAMILY PASSION: Dan Miller and his sister Erin are first-year players on Western's men's and women's volleyball teams and are in three classes together — despite the fact he's five years older.

VOLLEYBALL: Mustangs set to attack Mac

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He quickly became a handy blocker for this year's Mustangs, to the point where he neutralized Ryerson's Ryan Vandenburg, a likely all-Canadian and the kill leader in the country, last weekend.

"Some guys get caught up in that, but I don't," he said. "I didn't know what to expect this year and didn't know how much I'd play. I just go out there and do what I can to help the team win. It's a great group of guys, great coach and a lot of fun. It's a high calibre of volleyball. It's fast and it took a while at first to adjust, but it's going well."

After finishing second in the league and earning a first-round playoff bye, the Western men take on McMaster in an Ontario university semifinal tomorrow at 2 p.m. at Alumni Hall. The Marauders are coached by ex-Western boss Dave Preston.

The winner plays York or Ryerson in a best-of-three

GAMES GLANCE

OUA women's volleyball quarter-final: Western vs. McMaster, today at 1 p.m. at Alumni Hall

OUA men's volleyball semifinal: Western vs. McMaster, tomorrow at 2 p.m. at Alumni Hall

Ontario final next week.

After rolling through the regular season, the Western women face Mac in a quarter-final today at 1 p.m. at Alumni. If they win, they'll hold the Ontario final four here next weekend.

Erin Miller knew early she wanted to play volleyball at a high level. Whenever the school season ended, she would zip into London to play club ball for the strong Forest City program.

Head coach Dean Lowrie switched the rookie to right-side hitter for the first time in her career — a move that has led to some playing time and some big kills.

"I didn't know what to expect coming in, but it's just been a great experience," she said. "We're working towards winning the Ontario title and going to nationals. We expect it to happen but if it doesn't, it won't put a damper on the season for me. I learned so much and the team has been so close, it's amazing."

It's the little things that have impressed Erin the most.

"Like Jori (Mustangs veteran libero Jori Hardin) proof-reading an essay I have due. Stuff like that, it's totally not expected but it's definitely appreciated."

Despite their similar situations, the Millers don't spend a lot of time talking volleyball.

"We both feel the same — we get enough of that at school," Erin said. "I might talk to my parents about it, but that's about it. We really don't see a lot of each other. Dan lives off-campus and I'm in residence. We practise at different times. But it is nice to have him around."