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Season never ends for versatile Beck

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Sacred Heart-Griffin High School senior Mallory Beck didn't choose sports — at least not nearly as much as sports chose her.

"I have two older brothers. I've been throwing a ball with them since I was born," Beck said. "I started around age 3 or 4 with coach-pitch (softball) and stuff like that. It was definitely early. I've been in a season for all four years of high school. I love staying busy. I don't know what I'd do if I wasn't playing a sport."

Beck — The State Journal-Register's Central State Eight Conference Female Athlete of the Year — kept both herself and the opposition busy.

In volleyball, she immediately assumed a leadership role that she kept throughout her senior year. Beck finished with 134 digs, 78 kills and 12 aces for first-year coach Kristin Sams.

"One of the highlights of coming over is I didn't have to coach against her anymore," said Sams, who was previously an assistant at Springfield High. "I really looked forward to coaching her and had a great experience coaching her."

"Her leadership was the biggest thing," Sams added. "I relied on her a lot last year for her leadership. Coming in as a brand-new coach, and getting a team to buy into my philosophy and make sure we're all one unit, she took that captain's role, ran with it and exceeded my expectations."

Then it was on to basketball, where Beck's best season helped fuel the best record in SHG history. The Blazers went 26-4.

"That was the best season I've had and we had as a team," Beck said. "Our team has been so successful. We lost four games total, and three were to Springfield."

The last loss to the Senators prevented SHG from winning its first girls basketball regional since 2002. Beck finished the season averaging 17.6 points and 8.8 rebounds.

"She led us in scoring and rebounding, and she's always been a pretty good defender," SHG girls basketball coach Mario Borders said. "And her leadership ... she stepped into the role of being a leader, being that go-to person and carrying the team when she needed to. She was there to help teammates out. All-around, it was just an outstanding year, and she really was the heart and soul of the team this year."

Softball star

Beck was the starting third baseman for the softball team, which went 28-7 and advanced to the Class 3A Mount Zion Sectional final, losing 6-5 Saturday to Danville. Beck hit .400 with eight doubles, three triples, 20 RBIs and 30 runs scored.

The one item missing from that stat line was a home run. The Blazers hit a ton of them this season, but Beck didn't reach the fences, and her teammates didn't let her forget about it.

"They do give me grief, especially Megan McLean," Beck said before the sectional final. "Before every at-bat, we do a handshake, and she says, 'Get your home run.'"

Beck provided something far more valuable than home runs.

"Whether it's practice, game drills, or anything you do, she does it 150 percent. It'd be nice to have nine or 10 other kids like that," SHG softball coach Al Yoho said.

Leadership is a well-entrenched word in the coach-speak lexicon. But when talking about Beck, all three of her varsity coaches brought up the word without prompting.

Borders said, "You've got to have someone around who doesn't have to say anything, they just have to show it. Diving after a ball, aggressive rebounding, it rubs off onto the other kids. When the younger ones see that, they see that's the kind of player they needed to play like."

Sams said: "You try to teach players that hard work will pay off. It may not be fun, but the benefits and rewards at the end are so worth it, and she's the perfect example of that."

Yoho said: "She's one of the key pieces of the puzzle. I've seen her take balls off her chest and her face and throw people out. And I've never seen her mad or discouraged, even if she's in a (hitting) slump. She's probably the happiest kid on the team, I would say."

Voice of experience

Beck was a fixture in all three sports from the moment she arrived at SHG. That experience helped her to know exactly what type of leader she wanted to be.

"I've seen good leaders when I was a freshman and sophomore. I wanted someone to look up to, and that's what I wanted to be," Beck said. "I wanted people to look up to me."

She also was a leader outside of SHG. Beck was diagnosed with diabetes at age 6, and she has spent time talking to other kids on how to cope with the disease and live a normal life.

"They were all sorts of different ages, anywhere from 5 to 20, kids that are even older than me," said Beck, who will play basketball

and softball at the University of Illinois Springfield. "I've shared my experiences with them. I told them that anything's possible. Don't let it hold you back and keep you from what you're capable of doing. It helps with my responsibility and leadership role . . . it motivates me to do more and never be satisfied."

Striving for more has served Beck well so far. And it's sure to keep paying dividends in the future.

Todd Engle can be reached at 788-1546.

Tally of votes

(First-place votes in parentheses)

Mallory Beck, SHG (10) 68

Kelly Korza, Springfield (6) 51

Amber Stephenson, Lincoln 19

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