

# Utah Valley Region 15 volleyball programs adapting to new level of competition

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American Heritage volleyball player Izzi Stratton (14) grins during the 3-0 Patriot win at Utah Military Academy-Camp Williams on Sept. 19, 2019.

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The volleyball programs at American Heritage (a private school in American Fork) and Utah Military Academy-Camp Williams (a charter school in north Lehi) embarked on a new journey in 2019.

They started competing in Class 2A in the Utah High School Activities Association, assigned to compete in Region 15.

That meant that Thursday's match in Lehi between the visiting Patriots and home-standing Marauders was a league contest. Both teams had their moments, but in the end American Heritage came out with the 3-0 win (25-21, 25-16, 25-15).

But the real story for both programs is their evolution as they are developing their own identities.

The Patriots have an advantage there, since they have been competing for three years prior to joining the UHSAA in 2019.



American Heritage volleyball players (right) shake hands with Marauder players after the 3-0 Patriot win at Utah Military Academy-Camp Williams on Sept. 19, 2019.

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American Heritage volleyball player Izzi Stratton (14) hits the ball during the 3-0 Patriot win at Utah Military Academy-Camp Williams on Sept. 19, 2019.

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“We played in in the USSA league for the past few years,” American Heritage head coach Bailey Savage said. “This is our fourth year but our first year in UHSAA. Some of these girls were freshmen when we started and hadn’t really touched a volleyball, but now they are playing.”

Patriot senior Rebecca Stratton has been with the teams since her freshman year, so she has seen the team grow together.

“It’s been lots of fun because it’s so fun to play with our teammates,” Stratton said. “It’s been really cool to play together and move up together. Now we get to experience the next level of competition. The better teams you play you experience getting so much better.”

She said the best part has been being able to compete with her sisters Izzi Stratton and Rachel Stratton.

“That’s one of my favorite parts,” Rebecca Stratton said. “Our school, since it is so small, gives me opportunities to play with my siblings and that’s what I love most about it. Volleyball is such a mental game but overall I think it is so much fun to play with the people you love and have those experiences together.”

Savage said she has been proud of the overall growth of the American Heritage volleyball program over the last few years.

“It’s really fun to see them get to this level because they have come a long ways,” Savage said. “They’ve gone from not knowing how to pass to being able to get the pass up pretty regularly. Their serving has improved a ton too Some of the players couldn’t get the ball over the net during the first couple of years but now they get aces.”

It’s a more challenging situation for the UMA-CW, which has only been in its current location for two years.

“We are trying to build the program and try and get it going,” Marauders head coach Chelsey John said. “We have girls who have never played before. The school was trying to have a soccer team but didn’t have enough girls, so they came to the volleyball team. We are on a different level because we are teaching them how to play the sport.”

The charter school is oriented toward a military-style education experience but John said she believes only about 10 percent of the enrollment are girls.

“We have nine players total for varsity and junior varsity,” John said. “It is a little bit harder — but what I love is that you get to know the students and your players more. I feel like they have a closer bond with each other.”

There is definitely a learning curve for UMA-CW but John has loved seeing her girls take on the challenges — as well as the support of other volleyball teams.

“We went to Wyoming and played against some 6A schools, very good schools,” John said. “We hadn’t scored at all, had zero points through three matches. Finally we had a match where we scored. It was like, 11-2, but all the parents in the crowd and the other teams were cheering for us. During that game was cheering for us. That was my favorite thing. Sports really do bring people together and that’s why I love it.”

It's not always easy for John or for the girls but she savors the little successes even more.

"I think these girls become a family," John said. "I'm just so proud of them. I do get frustrated but I'm so proud that they believe in themselves. Sometimes they will look over at me and be like, 'I did it, Coach!' I'm just screaming, 'You did it!' because I'm so proud. We are working on building up their confidence and self-esteem."

Both UMA-CW and American Heritage hope to see a lot of growth during the next month of competition.

Savage said she hopes her Patriots keep improving their skills so they can get more and more comfortable with making plays, while John said her main goal for the Marauders is to see them put together an entire match with their confidence level high.

American Heritage next plays at Freedom Prep in Provo on Tuesday, while UMA-CW hosts Freedom Prep on Thursday.