

Close friendship carries onto volleyball court

By Aubree Broekemeier

When senior Stella Charles was four years old, she saw freshman Hadley Havelka as a baby for the first time. From that moment on, Charles knew that she and Havelka would be a part of each other's lives forever.

Now, years later, that bond has only grown stronger, especially on the volleyball court.

"We were kind of pushed together when we were little," Havelka said. "But since we are older, we are closer than ever."

Havelka, a setter, and Charles, an outside hitter, both have the same idea about their connection. Both talk very highly of each other, especially Havelka.

"Stella has been a role model for me," Havelka said. "Not just on the court, but in life."

That respect is mutual. Charles, as a senior leader, always hoped to be a role model for the younger girls — especially Hadley. The two have trained together, lifted together and now finally get to compete together — something they dreamed about for years.

With Charles being a role model for Havelka, she feels that she can trust Charles to 'make the right play'. Even with this trust on the court, her trust off the court feels more sister-like than best friends.

Coach Keshia Havelka — Hadley's mom — has had a front-row seat to their connection from the beginning.

"Stella and Hadley have known each other all of Hadley's life," she said. "So, 14 years."

For Coach Havelka, their bond goes far beyond friendship. It's something deeper.

“Even with their age gap, Stella always finds a way to include Hadley,” Havelka said. “I’m incredibly grateful for their relationship.”

Their time together on the court may be limited, but the impact they’ve made on each other is lasting. For Hadley, being able to play with Stella — even if just for one season — is something she’ll carry with her long after this year ends.

For Stella, finishing her senior year playing alongside someone she’s known since birth feels like the perfect end to her high school volleyball career.

“I think when I’m playing with Stella, I’m playing for her,” Hadley said. “When she’s not out there, I’m just playing for myself. But when she’s next to me, it means more.”