

Kabalis to enjoy visit

Senior outside hitter to lead tough Silverswords against Vulcans

By KEVIN JAKAHI
Tribune-Herald staff writer

It will be a fond farewell for Chaminade's Kahala Kabalis, when she plays in her hometown for the last time against the University of Hawaii at Hilo volleyball team.

The 5-foot-9 senior outside hitter, from Hilo, is the oldest daughter of former UHH great Carla Carpenter-Kabalis, who's in the NAIA Hall of Fame, and one of several talented athletes in the family.

The Vulcans (4-10 overall, 1-4 Pacific West Conference) host Chaminade (10-3, 5-1) at 7:15 p.m. today and Saturday at UHH Gym.

For today's match, anyone wearing two pieces of Vulcan paraphernalia will get half-price admission. On Saturday, it's free admission for military personnel, firefighters, police officers, paramedics, doctors and their families.

Kabalis, who landed on the All-PWC first team last season, is fourth in the conference in kills per game at 4.31 and sixth in digs with 3.15, solid numbers on a well-balanced Silversword squad.

"She plays a lot bigger than she is," UHH coach Julie Morgan said. "A lot of it comes from her determination and commitment to work hard and be competitive. She finds a way to win."

But the 2001 Moanalua High graduate, who has the same self-driven determination as her mom, said she sees room for improvement.

"I've been a little inconsistent," Kabalis said. "I'm working on that. I think I've been trying too hard. I need to relax and focus on what needs to be done."

"I'm excited to play in front of my family and play in my hometown."

Carpenter-Kabalis, who played at UHH from 1978 to '81, will be in a rush to make tonight's match. That's because she's the coach and her husband Sodie is an assistant for the Hilo High girls team, which has a standout player named Kaleinani Kabalis.

The Hilo freshman is shorter than her older sister by a couple of inches. But she shares the same set of fundamentally sound skills. Kuulei Kabalis, an eighth grader at Kamehameha, is another upcoming standout.

"Kaleinani is amazing," Kabalis said. "At 14 years old, she's really good. I think the way it is I'm better than my mom and my sister will be better than me. And Kuulei is great. She's got good setting hands and is a lefty. When she keeps growing, she's going to be good."

Carpenter-Kabalis said Kahala was instrumental in planting the volleyball family tree, with her desire to play the sport year-round. When Kahala was in the seventh grade, Carpenter-Kabalis started a club team. Now, there are nine teams, including a boys division.

"Everybody is excited," Carpenter-Kabalis said. "We're hoping anybody she helped touch comes out and supports her. Budgie Baker, her coach from her youth days, is excited to watch her, too."



Chaminade University's Kahala Kabalis and teammates await an opponent's serve during recent PWC women's volleyball action. Kabalis, a 5-foot-9 senior, will lead the Silverswords against the host Vulcans today and Saturday.

Whenever Chaminade comes to town, it's always a grand reunion of former Vulcans. Head coach Glennie Adams and assistant Tanya (Fuamatu) Anderson played at UHH from 1978 to '80 and '82, and 1992 to '95, respectively. Baker played at UHH from 1978 to '79.

UHH assistant Alofa Tagataese, an NAIA Hall of Famer like Carpenter-Kabalis and Adams, played for the Vulcans from 1980 to '83.

"Alofa is a great addition for Julie," Adams said. "It's always special and I know Tanya feels the same way for us to return to Hilo. There's a lot of pride to be part of that program and come back."

Adams also set a blueprint on how to build a winner, with local recruits as the core of the team. Besides Kabalis, outside hitter Valasi Sepulona (Farrington), middle blocker Patti Hardimon (Moanalua) and libero Kalae Araujo (St. Francis) are starters from Hawaii.

Hardimon pounded 19 kills while Kabalis and Sepulona added 14 each and Araujo contributed 20 digs as Chaminade upset No. 8 Hawaii Pacific in three sets Tuesday night, vaulting the Silverswords into a first-place tie in the conference with the Sea Warriors.

In 2002, Chaminade qualified for the postseason for the first time in the school's history, behind the one-two punch of outside hitters Kabalis and Sepulona.

UHH hasn't been to the postseason since 1997. That drought coincides with the timing of Brigham Young University-Hawaii and HPU jumping from the NAIA to the Division II level in 1998.

With rosters stocked with international stars, the Seaside and Sea Warriors have dominated Division II, winning four national titles in six years.

In another sign of star power, a player from either BYUH or HPU has won the PacWest Player of the Year award every season since 1998.

"Kahala, Valasi and Kalae are the higher caliber," Adams said. "The higher caliber local kids can compete. It's just that most times, they opt to go away to mid-major colleges."

"The postseason is always a goal. As far as our chances, it's as good as anybody's. We feel confident and our conference is strong. On any given night, anybody can beat anybody."

Meanwhile, the last hometown appearance for Kabalis will bring back a few memories. She pointed out it's a role reversal with her on the court and familiar faces watching.

"It will be fun to see everyone watching me," Kabalis said. "I remember I used to watch them when I was little. It will be a good experience and it's my senior year, my last year."

Kevin Jakahi can be reached at kjakahi@hawaii-tribune-herald.com.

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