



The Jersey Girls Volleyball Club, Inc.

Samantha Kurtzke, Motivated by the Desire to Succeed and the Love of the Game

DIGS goal is focused on the development of the student athlete, providing each individual athlete the teaching of sportsmanship, teamwork, skills training, confidence, and much more. With that goal in mind it becomes the athlete's responsibility to take what they are being taught, improve on their skills and grow as an athlete.

Freshman Year

At the age of 15 Samantha was thinking about playing volleyball. She touched the ball a few times at one of the town sponsored clinics and then again at the High School sponsored clinic. As a freshman she tried out for the team, being told that no one gets cut as a freshman, she thought it would be fun, and she would be with her friends. Serving, what was that? Get the ball over the net, no way. Block the ball at the net, what do you mean? That was the way her freshman career started. By the end of her freshman season she had learned about rotations and was able to leverage her height in the middle to block an occasional ball across the middle.

After her Freshman High School season was over, her coaches suggested that the players who were interested in continuing on should try out for club volleyball. At the time, Coach McDonald was also one of the coaches at DIGS Volleyball Club so that is where Samantha wanted to go. Why not, her friends were trying out. When Samantha received the call from DIGS saying that she made the 15 Blue team, a developmental team, she was excited. Her friends made the Red and White team but that didn't matter, she made a team.

The club season started, and her coach, Gil Rivers, started to watch Samantha at the net and trying to serve. "Samantha, are you a righty or a lefty?" Good question. She knew she wrote with her left hand but playing sports she did things with her right. The coaches worked with Samantha, getting her to learn to use her left hand. As a Lefty, being taught by right handed coaches was difficult but she was determined. Samantha had to watch each drill or technique being taught and reverse each step, each movement from the right to the left. Samantha played middle and started to learn to block, hit lefty and occasionally get a serve over the net.

Sophomore Year

As a sophomore, Samantha made the Junior Varsity team. She knew she had a long way to go in ability but had grown to love the sport and couldn't spend enough time on the court. The season went well. She was the team's starting middle and began to block the ball on a steady basis. Hitting and serving was still a challenge, but she kept working at it.

When Club Season came around Samantha tried out for DIGS again. She made 16 White team, with Bill Lee as the coach. Shortly after the Capitol Hill Classic tournament in February, Samantha added speed and agility training twice a week to her busy schedule. Samantha worked hard with Bill during practice, stayed after practice, and going to extra practices, taking in everything the coaches were telling her. She started to learn the nuances of the game such as anticipation and understanding angles. She also attended the setter's practices with Scott Mose. Why? Because it was more time on the court, more practice sessions. The DIGS 16 White team finished 10th in GEVA, consistently beating other Club's 1's team in their age bracket.



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Junior Year

Over the summer, Samantha attended two camps that helped her improve. She attended a High Performance camp in Kentucky for a week and another closer to home. Both camps had left handed coaches on staff and Samantha really benefited from their ability to fine tune her mechanics.

As a Junior, Samantha made the Varsity Team. She was the starting right side hitter. Samantha had grown in strength, ability, and most importantly confidence. She faced the challenges of learning a new position and being taught the nuances of the right side hitters approach from someone who is right handed and then transferring that to a lefty approach head on. This was a special group of girls. They meshed well on and off of the court. They worked hard and they played with passion. This hard work, talent, and passion for the game culminated in their winning the NJ Group I State Championship. It was amazing to think that the awkward and unskilled freshman could have transformed into a key member of a State Championship team.

When Club season arrived, Samantha tried out for DIGS. She made the 17 White team, coached by Alicia Rivers. The DIGS 17 White team finished 9th in GEVA, consistently beating other Club's 1's team in their age bracket.

Senior Year

Coach McDonald had a dilemma this year. She graduated 7 seniors last year, one being her 4 year Varsity setter. Who on the team could step up and be a setter? Who thought that a 6 foot, right side, lefty could handle the new role? Just three years ago she didn't know if she was a righty or a lefty, two years ago she was still struggling with her serves. Samantha stepped up to the challenge. She worked closely with Coach McDonald (a 4 year starting setter and 2nd all time assist leader from Seton Hall University) to learn her 3rd position in as many years. The team finished the season as Divisional Co-Champions and made it to the Group II North Championship match where they lost to a dominant Ramapo HS team. Samantha finished, statistically, as one of the top setters in the state and earned individual recognition at the divisional and county level.

Club season, Samantha played on the 18 White team with Kelvin Lo as the coach. She went back to right side but was always there and ready when a setter was needed. Her serving was consistent, her hitting and blocking was strong. The DIGS 18 White team finished 7th in GEVA, and again consistently beating other Club's 1's team in their age bracket.

In addition to playing for DIGS this year, Samantha also took on the responsibility of being the Assistant Coach for two other DIGS Teams, 15 White and 15 Blue. She looks forward to coaching more in the future.

College?

Looking back at Samantha's High School volleyball career, we have a player who couldn't hit a ball, get a serve over the net, or even know what hand to use. Club season, starting on the 15 Blue team, which had the stigma of being the players with no skill, probably shouldn't be on a team and will be lucky if they make a team next year. Well, we can tell you, it does not matter what team you make or where you start from. With the training provided by the DIGS coaching staff and most important, the desire, ambition, dedication of the athlete, the athlete can go far. College, yes, Division II, yes – Samantha had a few Division II colleges interested in her, a few offering her athletic scholarships. In the end, she has chosen to go to Concordia College, Division II, majoring in Education and playing volleyball. In addition to her college endeavors she continues to coach with DIGS.