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Chris Markuson sets pace for Rivier College men's volleyball

By TOM KING

Staff Writer

NASHUA – Chris Markuson doesn't exactly like the limelight. But he's been such a great player for the Rivier University men's volleyball team the last four years, he really doesn't have a choice.

"I didn't think I would be as relied upon as I am," Markuson said. "I mean, I'm not big on light shedding on me. I'm kind of an introvert. I'm not saying I don't like it. I just want to play, be with my teammates. Anything I can do to help the team and help me get better, I enjoy."

"He can do everything," Raiders coach Craig Kolek said. "The fact that he's a team player, his demeanor, laid back, nothing flusters him at all.

"He's been pretty focused all season but the last three weeks he's turned it up a notch. It's all or nothing for him, and he's kind of played that way."

This is the home stretch for Markuson, a 6-5 Raider senior whose team begins tournament play Thursday as the Great Northeast Athletic Conference's top seed, and has eyes on yet another NCAA tourney berth.

He's a converted baseball player, starting volleyball his freshman year St. Francis High School in Cupertino, Calif., after playing baseball most of his young life prior.

"I just kind of got bored of it," he said, even though he played third base and other positions. "I wanted to do something different so I picked volleyball."

Markuson was a sensation from the start in high school, starting in the middle and moving to the outside, coaches telling him he was "better than they thought."

"I liked the fast pace of it, the go-go-go," he said. "You get a rally, then you stop and rest for 10 seconds, and then it's go-go-go again. It's kind of cool in that regard."

Kolek, though, was the only coach who really recruited him. A few Division I schools offered him a chance to walk-on, but Markuson liked the "family atmosphere" at Rivier when he came out on a recruiting trip and also wanted to go to a small school.

It turned out to be a four-year perfect fit. He made an impact right away, as GNAC Player of The Year and Rookie of the Year right off the bat his freshman year, the first time a Raider has ever done both. He has a shot at being the conference Player of the Year again, third in the conference in kills per set and second in digs, and last week was named both the

conference's Offensive and Defensive Player of the Week.

"What I liked about him was he was a team player, very humble, had a good demeanor with his teammates," Kolek said. "He was good when he came in, but he's consistently good now."

Kolek says that the key for Markuson is the fact he's such an unselfish player. Even Markuson acknowledges that his passing is the best part of his game, as it came natural to him. "And I don't know why," he said.

"But that's what I want to be the best at."

But he says his game right now has been his hitting. "I'm trying to get my big boy swing down, and just go after it," he said.

This could be an emotional time for Markuson, as a senior, as the Raiders are now at the point where any match could be their last. But this is when his cool demeanor takes over.

"Nothing really changes," he said. "I know there's a lot of pressure on us, but to me it's still volleyball, come in day after day, having fun and playing the game. I'm not too worried about it. I think we'll be fine."

The future? He'll likely play beach volleyball, deciding not to play overseas. He's a biology major with the hope of going to dental school in the next couple of years. He'll take the coming year after

graduation off to study for the dental school admission test.

The adjustment from California to the east coast wasn't an issue. "I love it out here," he said.

Of course, he'll take great memories with him. Winning an NCAA Division III quarterfinal game two years ago as a sophomore and making it to the Final Four was an experience he won't forget. Can this year's team do the same?

"I think we can do great things," Markuson said.

But for the Raiders, they will tell you their cornerstone already has.

High marks

Thanks in part to their indoor play in the Hampshire Dome in Milford, the Daniel Webster College women's softball team got off to a great start last week as far as New England Collegiate Conference awards.

They enjoyed a clean sweep as Abigail Goslin, a junior from Wrentham, Mass., was named Player of the Week, while pitcher Sarah Durocher got Pitcher of the Week honors and sophomore Kayla Free was named Rookie of the Week.

Goslin picked up a pitching win over Pine Manor but also hit .625, going 5 for 8 and had seven runs scored. Durocher picked up two pitching wins allowing no earned runs and Free went 5 for 10, scored six runs, knocked in seven and had a homer during the Eagles' hot start.

Farewell

It's official: the great career of DWC men's volleyball standout Joel Hendrix of Kane'ohe, Hawaii, is over. He had a match high 15 kills in a 3-0 win over Lesley University late last week, but the Eagles were eliminated from playoff contention with Newbury's win over Regis.

The Eagles wound up 5-7 in the NECC, 5-13 overall.

On hold

It looks like for the second straight year, the Rivier and Daniel Webster baseball teams will not play each other, thanks to the horrendous weather. Tuesday's scheduled doubleheader at Holman Stadium was postponed as the playing surface still needs winter recovery.

Conference games will likely take up the bulk of the remaining schedule for both schools.

The 3-11 Eagles at last look had dropped 10 in a row, outscored 48-8 in their last five vs. Mitchell and Lesley.

Rivier, meanwhile, is a bit better, at 5-11 overall, 1-3 GNAC).

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