

## **Jaeschke Leads Successful Sophomore Season**

The second year extra hitter leading by more than just example

By Joe Flaherty

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When Head Men's Volleyball Coach Shane Davis went on a recruiting trip in the winter of 2012, he surely expected to connect with many talented prospects. He also surely didn't expect to make the most important connection at an airport.

Sophomore outside hitter Thomas Jaeschke wasn't even on Davis' radar following a tournament in Anaheim. Despite standing 6'6", winning a national championship at Wheaton Warrenville South High School, and making the nation-wide 'Fab 50' prospect list, Jaeschke was a self-described 'late bloomer' and wasn't heavily recruited.

While he flew back home with his club team, his mother, who came to watch him play, was traveling home via a different airport. So was Davis.

"She was sitting there and saw me and asked 'were you at the tournament? You kind of look like a volleyball player,'" Davis said. "She found out I was the coach at Loyola and that's how everything got started."

That meeting couldn't have happened at a better time. Jaeschke was nearly committed to Penn State, but the events that followed his mom's run-in with Davis pushed him to become a Rambler.

"I came here on my unofficial and really liked it," Jaeschke said "I liked the guys and the time we spent together just hanging out. Nothing against Penn State, I just liked here better."

The proximity to home was also a plus, having grown up less than an hour from campus in Warrenville, Illinois. His family is able to come to almost every game, as they were for Loyola's recent victory over none other than No. 14 Penn State.

In that match, Jaeschke drilled 19 kills to tie a career high. That accomplishment adds to a running list that has already reached staggering proportions.

The 2013 MIVA Freshman of the Year finished second on the team with 344 kills and 22 service aces. He was later named to the MIVA All-Conference First Team and All-Championship Team and followed that up by being named a Preseason Second-Team All-American heading into 2014.

That's a far cry from anyone's expectations of Jaeschke, even his own.

"I was planning on coming in and being a serving sub or something. I expected to come in, serve, hopefully dig a few balls and get a few runs. But obviously I did a little more than that."

This season he's on pace to do 'a little more than that,' trailing only Joe Smalzer in kills (211), service aces (22) and points (244.5) through 20 matches. He leads the team in digs (122) and is the only Rambler to earn AVCA National Player of the Week honors this season after recording back to back double-doubles during the week of Feb. 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Jaeschke credits constant reps in practice and in the weight room with for his ability to progress so quickly. Though he leads by example with his play, he's making another type of impact in his sophomore season.

"He's come into his own being a leader off the court for us," Davis said. "It's not by any of us telling him he needs to do that. That's just kind of the person he's turning into"

With seniors Joe Smalzer and Peter Jasaitis in their final season, Jaeschke thinks he can be one of the players who steps up to fill the production and leadership voids. But he knows the responsibility won't solely rest on him.

"Anyone can," Jaeschke said. "If we're down, I can get in front of the team and talk to them and everyone will listen. Everyone listens to everyone."

Jaeschke cites that camaraderie and selflessness as the reasons why the team has excelled this season. Davis said Jaeschke wouldn't mind having a scoreless night if it meant the team got the victory.

Luckily for the Ramblers, Jaeschke seldom has a scoreless night, and they seldom leave a match without a win. The team is currently 19-1 and on the program's second longest winning streak at 17 matches. They've won eight matches against ranked opponents and are carrying the nation's top ranking for the eighth consecutive week.

Just don't ask Jaeschke to recite those numbers.

"We've won X amount in a row, but what does that mean tomorrow?" Jaeschke said. "Opponents don't care, if anything that's another reason for them to want to beat us. We just focus on the next match and not worry about the numbers."

He admits that it's hard to block out all of the outside noise, but he knows that they can only control what happens on the court. As long as they keep giving their best effort day in and day out, the rest will fall into place.

And Jaeschke still thinks the best is yet to come.

"We've had stretches of good serving, good passing, good hitting," Jaeschke said. "Now we need to put it all together."

The Ramblers will have five more chances to do so before postseason play begins on April 18<sup>th</sup>, starting this Thursday when they host No. 13 Ball State.