

Learning from the Best

By Dax Larson

4/3/06

Mankato, Minn. – It's always nice to have someone to look up to, someone to strive to be like. In sports, this person is usually a professional that we see on television. For freshman Danielle Zimmermann it wasn't someone she saw on TV



or someone she will never meet. It was a good-hearted, hard-working senior in the same program she was in. For Danielle, senior Tiffany "Tiff" Graham was all she needed.

"Tiffany has been a great role model for me," Danielle said. "I've made it one of my goals to "go out" with the same respect she has earned as an athlete and a person."

After living with Tiff during the preseason, Danielle started to write things down about Tiff throughout the season. Everyday Danielle would write something about things she learned about Tiff as a person, skills of the game, loving the game, and things more important than the game. Tiff helped

Danielle ease into college life and collegiate volleyball.

"It is important to have mentors," head volleyball coach Dennis "Aame" Amundson said. "It is unusual for an athlete to play an entire season without any performance regrets. Tiff was able to accomplish that last year and Danielle watched her do it. So far, Danielle is living the same dream."

After learning so much from her mentor and being such a strong athlete, Danielle has improved her game tremendously. Last weekend in a spring tournament at Concordia St. Paul, Danielle was the second leading hitter in 12 games played. This is impressive coming from someone who had volleyball last on her list in high school. As a freshman, Danielle wanted to be a cheerleader for the football team, but her volleyball coach was determined she play volleyball, so they let her play both. As a sophomore she again wanted to be a cheerleader, but a persistent volleyball coach wanted her to play volleyball. She trusted him and quit cheering. Later that year she joined a club volleyball team and after that there was no way a skirt and pom-poms would ever challenge the game of volleyball again.

"At MSU, we are going to look for good athletes, with a high learning curve, and a considerable upside potential," Aame said. "Danielle fits that bill."

Danielle came to the Maverick program after being a four-sport athlete at Grundy Center High School in Wellsberg, Iowa. Danielle was on her way to the volleyball state tournament her senior year when she decided to sign with MSU. She thought MSU would be a good fit for her because of its size and location from home.

"(Being a four-sport athlete) got me used to having a busy schedule and I learned early I have to stay organized," Danielle said. "I also think being well-rounded and implying the skills I learned in other sports can increase my success."