

Four community college athletes earn weekly honors

Chris Wimmer, Special for azcentral sports 2:51 p.m. MST September 18, 2015



(Photo: Deirdre Hamill/azcentral sports)

The Valley is rich with community-college athletic talent, and that quality of play was honored by two different leagues the past two weeks. Two volleyball players, two football players and a soccer player all received Player of the Week acknowledgment.

The Arizona Community College Athletic Conference has honored a volleyball player from a Valley college as its Division II Player of the Week in each of the first three weeks of the season. Misha McDowell of Glendale Community College and Angela Molesworth of Scottsdale Community College kept the streak alive the past two weeks.

McDowell's response when asked to describe the feeling of winning a national championship in 2014 was simple and direct: "Overwhelming. Exciting. Unreal."

This year's team picked up where last year's squad left off, with two exceptions. Last year, McDowell, who attended Gilbert Campo Verde High School, was a freshman who played a role on an underdog team that won the title. This year, she's one of the leaders on the undefeated No. 2 team in the nation. GCC won't be catching

anyone by surprise.

"We're just working day by day, game by game, to see how our season goes," said McDowell, who earned her Player of the Week nod on Sept. 8. "We're starting off strong, so hopefully we can continue to do that throughout the season."

Said Glendale CC coach Lisa Stuck: "She had a really good offensive performance against the two teams we played that week. (She) had quite a few attempts for a middle blocker with one error in two matches and zero errors in our match against Scottsdale on 19 attempts. So, that's error-free ball and you really don't see that very often with middle blockers."

McDowell said she was drawn to the coach and the strong program at GCC.

Stuck has been the driving force behind the team for 19 years and was honored as the NJCAA coach of the year for District I in 2014 after the Gauchos defied the odds to win the title.

Like many student-athletes at community colleges, McDowell hopes to play at a four-year university when her career at GCC is done, but for the moment there is still a title to defend and matches against South Mountain Community College, Pima College and Phoenix College this week.

Molesworth became the second player at Scottsdale Community College to be named player of the week when she earned the recognition on Sept. 14. Molesworth and a previous honoree, Jemima Idemudia, have led SCC to an 8-2 record and a No. 6 national ranking.

Soccer

Success is not unfamiliar to the Phoenix College men's team, but defeating perennial powerhouse and rival Yavapai College on its own field in consecutive years is a new benchmark.

In the overtime thriller, freshman forward Carlo Valadez slammed home the winning goal in the third minute of the sudden-death period.

"To be honest, I was so tired by the time we got into that overtime, the first opportunity I got, I wanted to finish it," Valadez said.

That finish, plus the three goals he scored against Paradise Valley Community College in the previous match, earned him Player of the Week on Sept. 9.

Valadez, originally from Santa Rosa, Calif., attended Avondale Westview before enrolling at Phoenix College. He began the season with a nagging knee injury, but when he got his time to shine, he did. He has now scored eight goals in six matches. Valadez also has four assists and is tied in total points (12) with Juan Hernandez, who is the team's leading scorer with nine goals.

PC is currently ranked 12th in Division I and is enjoying its third straight year in the national polls. Last season, the Bears advanced to the NJCAA Region I finals, but if this year's team is going to match last year's success, it will need strong play from young players like Hernandez and Valadez.

"We are very young. We only have two sophomores on the team," coach Dave Cameron said. "But, this team can score goals so as we're trying to figure things out, as far as how we organize defensively and offensively, it's nice to have goal scorers. We have four or five goal scorers on this team and we typically only have one."

Meanwhile, the Phoenix College women's team is enjoying unprecedented success. The team suffered two early losses but is now riding a six-game winning streak. After recent victories at Cochise College and Mesa Community College, they earned a spot in the national polls for the first time in team history.

The women were ranked No. 14 in the poll released on Sept. 10 and after a shutout win against Glendale Community College on Sept. 9, they should see their stock rise even higher next week.

Taylor Claiborne continues to lead the way for the Bears. The freshman forward from Glendale Raymond S. Kellis High School has 11 goals this season, which ranks her No. 3 nationally among Division I goal scorers.

Football

Rounding out an impressive week of individual honors for athletes in the Valley, Aeron Carr and Rathen Ricedorff of Mesa Community College were named WSFL players of the week on special teams and offense, respectively, for their performances in a double-overtime 55-52 victory over Phoenix College.

Carr, a sophomore who played at Mesa Red Mountain, had five kickoff returns for 146 yards, highlighted by a 91-yard touchdown that broke a 21-21 tie in the first half.

Ricedorff, a freshman quarterback from Show Low High School, had a monster performance that helped Mesa earn its first win of the season. He threw for 249 yards and four touchdowns while also rushing for 100 yards.

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