

EDUCATION/MENTORING

Volleyballers make a big impression

Team scores an ace with third-graders

BY JON POMPIA
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

The introductions were endearingly guileless.

"I'm Francisco, and I want to be a cop."

"My name's Jasmine, and I want to be an artist when I grow up."

"My name's Cameron, and I want to be a veterinarian."

"My name's James, and I want to be a break dancer."

One and all, the career ambitions of third-graders at Eva R. Baca Elementary School inspired smiles and bursts of applause from the day's honored guests — volleyball players from Black Hills (S.D.) State University.

As Baca Elementary stresses college readiness at an early age through its status as a No Excuses University, classrooms are encouraged to partner up with universities both near and far.

This particular association evolved after teacher Rachelle Phillips — a native of South Dakota whose children attended volleyball camps at BHSU — invited the university to adopt her classroom.

Before long, the students received Yellow Jacket gear and motivational materials and, in turn, acclimated themselves to their newfound big brothers and sisters by researching the school and its location, with special attention to the university's academic and athletic offerings.

"We've even been learning the Yellow Jackets' fight song," Phillips said. "It's a little harder than I thought, so



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Kenzie Kazmer (right), a member of the Black Hills State (South Dakota) volleyball team, gets a hug from Jordan Masranase, 8, a third-grade student at Eva R. Baca Elementary School on Friday.

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we haven't quite got it down."

This virtual bond was consummated Friday with the volleyballers' visit to the school in anticipation of an evening matchup at Colorado State University-Pueblo.

Encouraged to learn more about the congenial student-athletes, the third-graders lobbed a succession of questions, several of which led to some laughter-inducing exchanges.

"How old are you?"
"I'm 20."

"You only look 18."
"Well, thank you."

Or this:
"Who would win if it was boys against girls in volleyball?"

"Oh, girls for sure."
"That's cause girls rule!"
And this:
How do you get so tall?
"You eat all your vegetables."

"And by doing your math homework," Phillips added.

Following the entertaining meet-and-greet, the Yellow Jackets set up a (boisterous) mini volleyball camp in the school gym, where the enthusiastic youngsters learned some of the basics of the game and exchanged more than a few hugs and high-fives.

Said the team's head coach Kristin Carmichael, "This is all about telling kids that they can do anything they want to, be anything they want to be."

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Brynn Eckhardt, a center for the Black Hills State volleyball team, has some fun with Baca school students during a volleyball lesson in the school gym.