

Alumni Spotlight: GBN duo earn accolades at Carthage



Zach Lillig, a 6-foot-7 middle blocker, starts for Carthage. Photos from Carthage College Sports Information

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Four years after Glenbrook North's most successful boys volleyball season, alums Cody Bolan and Zach Lillig are still making history.

The Spartans duo that helped GBN reach its only state championship game ever has reunited at Carthage College and boosted the Red Men to new heights.

Bolan, a junior, and Lillig, a sophomore, each played an integral role in Carthage's program record 26-match winning streak. Carthage's 27-2 record in 2016 had the team peak at No. 2 in the national rankings, and a Midwest Collegiate Volleyball League title saw the team clinch an appearance in the NCAA Division III championship, where they lost in the quarterfinals.

"We fell short once again this year and it was really disappointing," Bolan said. "It's tough getting so close, but yet not taking it all. But I think we always have confidence in each other and as a team. Whenever we're moving forward, we know we're gonna give it our all. It's been a tough two years even though it's been successful at times because we have such high expectations, but I think that's good. I think it makes us better people."

Bolan and Lillig are no strangers to high pressure. As a senior at GBN, Bolan was the conference player of the year and an All-American honorable mention. Lillig too would earn All-Conference honors that same season. With much expected of them at the collegiate level, the former Spartans have lived up to the hype.

In 2016, Bolan, a libero, was named to the All-MCVL tournament team. Lillig has added multiple MCVL Player of the Week honors to his trophy collection.

After visiting Carthage his senior year of high school, Bolan was quickly sold on the program.

"I love the facilities and I like the people there too," Bolan said. "It was a nice campus. They were fighting for a national championship, they were a really good team. I kind of went in blindly though because I didn't visit much. And as soon as I went in, I knew I didn't make a mistake."

All in on Red Men volleyball as a freshman, Bolan played a critical role in recruiting Lillig, who plays middle blocker.

"When I came on my visit to Carthage I stayed with Cody," Lillig said. "I just had the most fun with them than I did when I went on my other visits. So I was thinking about what school would be best for me and I just realized I would have a much better group of friends and a really good program at Carthage. Honestly, Cody was one of the main reasons I came here just because I had such a good time when I came on the visit with him. If Cody wasn't there I don't know if I would have looked there to begin with."

Since Lillig's arrival at Carthage, the Red Men have won back-to-back conference championships.

"He can hit any ball that comes his way, which is impressive," Bolan said. "He's a long guy, he's athletic and he just finds ways to get kills. He's a very offensive player who was built to be a volleyball player. He's 6-foot-7."

Bolan, however, does not possess the same physical gifts. He entered college at just 5-foot-7, weighing 142 pounds. Undersized, Bolan, nicknamed "Grinder," has had to work extra hard and do the little things to be an impactful player. Over three years at Carthage, he has added nearly 40 pounds of muscle and grown three inches.

"His leadership all throughout and the constant effort (he gives) is what he does best on the court," Lillig said of Bolan. "I don't know any other player that puts in as much effort for every play and every point as he does. Off the court, I think he's just a great guy and a great friend for all of us. He's just a really easy guy to get along with and a good example as a Carthage Red Man."

Through four years as teammates, it is difficult for the one-two punch to believe this coming season will be their last together, as Bolan, who is expected to be a team captain, enters his senior year. Though it may be sobering, Bolan remains optimistic and believes there is still another chapter to be written.

"I'm going to be 100 miles an hour every play, just because I know how hard it's going to be to win a national championship," Bolan said. "My personal goal is to be the best libero in the nation and be the best leader for this team. As a team, we want to play to our full potential. If that means that we have the talent to be a national champion, then we should go win a national championship."