

ATHLETE OF THE WEEK

10 Questions with Niko Gjaja

Gjaja is a rising senior on the New Trier boys volleyball team. He plays setter for the Trevs, who advanced to the state title game this season.

Do you have any pregame rituals or superstitions before a game?

We have a team meeting and discuss what we want to do in a match. Then we do a team huddle with just the players. We have this funny chant that we do and we try to get as loud as possible, which gets us really fired up.

What's on your pregame playlist?

Our team likes the classic this year. We ran out to "YMCA." It kinda threw teams off a little bit but we had a blast doing it.

Favorite North Shore restaurant and what do you get there?

I'd probably have to pick Prairie Joe's in Evanston. My general order is I start off with some hummus and pita, and then get a cheeseburger and a strawberry milkshake. So not exactly what most people would combine, but it's delicious.

What would your dream job be?

I'm really into science and medicine, so I think

my dream job would be to be some type of doctor or surgeon.

Who is your biggest inspiration?

I think my biggest inspiration to be honest is my dad. He used to play volleyball and he was on the Olympic team back in the day. Also, he does a great job of always making time to help me. If I could be half the dad that he is, I'd be very happy and my kids would have a great dad.

How did it feel to play in the state championship game?

It was a great feeling. It was a great learning experience to be playing in such a high level game. We walked in the gym and there were 500-600 people there. Hopefully we can get back to it next year.

Who is your favorite sports team?

The Blackhawks. The atmosphere when you go to their games is incredible. They're so loud. I love watching the games on TV too. They're a great team.

What's the best coaching advice you've ever received?

My coach this year told me to play every point like it's your last. You never know what's going to happen the next point. Something might happen



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and you just never know if you're gonna be able to play again. The teams that focus on that mindset tend to leave it all out there.

If you could travel anywhere, where would you go?

I'd pick Croatia. My family is from there. It's really nice to see them and it's also a beautiful place. The coast is just gorgeous and our family has a boat there.

What's your favorite part about being an athlete at New Trier?

I think just the opportunity to get such high-level competition and high-level facilities. At New Trier, we're obviously very fortunate with what we have. But at the same time, it's almost like you're playing small college sports. That's how high of a level of competition it is.

Interview by Editorial Intern Jack Vita



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