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Last dance for seniors

Lake County players come together at LSCC for All-Star volleyball match

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LEESBURG - Senior All-Star matches usually are about fun, so you never know what is going to happen.

The third-annual Get Imprinted High School Senior All-Star Volleyball Match might be unique, though, because it had Leesburg High's Alisha Hoffman and Eustis High's Dana Len as lead dance instructors.

The volleyball veterans had never played together before Tuesday night, but you never would have known that from how quickly the two joined in a dance step to the popular tune "Cotton Eye Joe" by Rednex.

The tune played during a timeout break in game two. Hoffman and her teammates already were on the court, and she couldn't help but going through the steps, toe taps and leg movements that appeared to go along with the song.

Hoffman attempted to get teammate and First Academy of Leesburg senior Taylor Becker to go along with her to no avail.

But Len, who was standing a few feet away, watched with a smile and soon joined in. Her steps weren't as involved as Hoffman's, but both players looked like they were having fun.

"I learned how to do the steps to 'Cotton Eye Joe' at a (Park) Middle School dance," Hoffman said. "I (practice) every day."

Apparently, the song was a big hit at the roller rinks in Mount Dora and Leesburg when both players went to middle school, which explains why Hoffman and Len broke out the dance steps when the song kicked on.

"It was pretty sexy. I liked it," Len said of Hoffman's steps. "I just had to join in."

Hoffman and Len are equally adept at playing volleyball.

Both players added a spark with their all-around play to help their team earn a 3-0 victory. Game scores were 25-19,

25-13, 25-23.

Mount Dora's KD Stearns and Ashley Bucher, Umatilla's Stephanie Robinson, Leesburg's Emily Owenby, Becker, East Ridge's Himiko Willingham and South Lake's Brittany Thomas teamed with Hoffman and Len on the winning squad.

Each team, though, offered flashes of the play that made them all-stars.

Len, Owenby, Hoffman and South Lake's Danielle Sewell offered diving digs to show offense wasn't the only skill on display.

Eustis High's Brittni Roberts and East Ridge's Nicole Fulton provided some of the evening's best swings.

Thomas, who with Sewell sported their trademark pink accented volleyball sneakers, showed her court awareness with a two-handed push that landed in the far

corner just in front of line judge Jessica Brady.

Tavares High's Audreanna Blount added some of the most effective serving of the match. While she served, Bucher sat on the bench next to East Ridge coach Tim Ferrell and attempted to duplicate Blount's unique up and under motion on the toss.

The play of the night, though, might have belonged to Len. In game three, the Eustis libero hustled back to use a one-armed swing to keep a ball alive. Thomas then moved into position to send a two-handed pass over the net.

Unfortunately, their team lost the point but rallied late to earn the sweep.

Len delivered an ace on a high-arching ball that appeared ready to sail long. After the ball fell in, the players came together for a cheer on which they formed a circle, bent at the waist and then threw their bodies back saying, "Whoo ahh."

The motion was just one of the steps that Hoffman, Len and their teammates incorporated into their match strategy.

Well, not really. But Hoffman and Len's energy seemed to bring that care-free attitude out of their teammates.

"We're the two most enthusiastic players out there, so ... ," Hoffman said.

Said Len, "She started yelling and then I yelled. I was like, 'OK, I like her.' "

Len started playing volleyball in middle school, but never participated in club volleyball. She said Tuesday's match might have been her final organized volleyball match.

Hoffman has been involved in club volleyball for a number of years. She hopes to continue playing volleyball in college.

If they aren't ever on the court again, they can enjoy the memory that for at least one night they had a chance to play volleyball together, practice their dance steps and their cheers at the same time and have fun.

"The one where we were like, 'Ace in your face? That was our ace cheer," Hoffman said. "We had it down. It was a lot of fun. We weren't worried about winning. We just wanted to have fun."