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NORTH SHORE GUIDE TO THE GAMES PEOPLE PLAY

Safe pass

Cap star trades bomb shelter for centre court

Andy Prest

aprest@nsnews.com

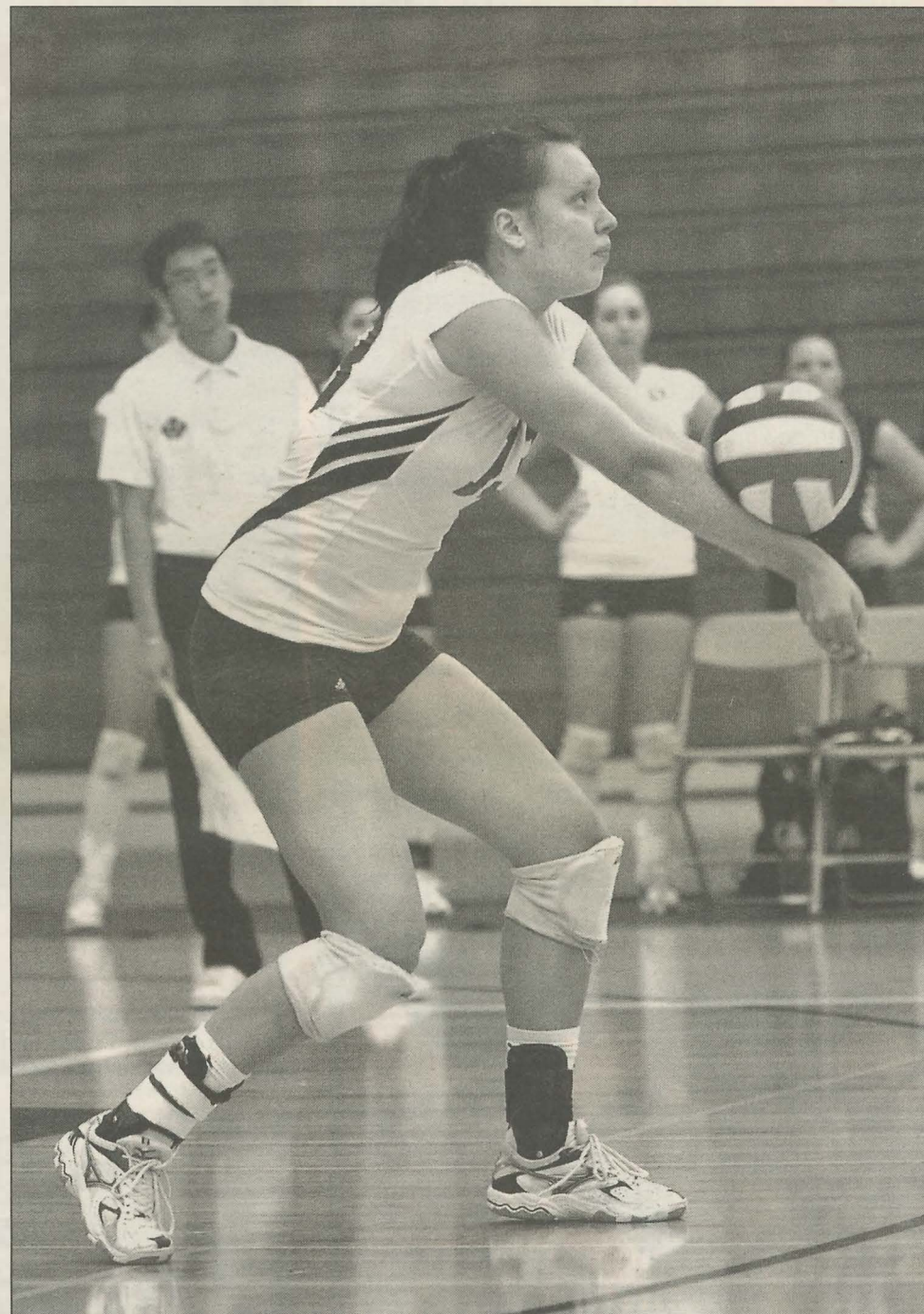
CAPILANO College second year volleyball player Marina Liarsky is leading the Blues on their quest to get back to the Canadian championships to avenge last year's home court loss in the national final.

This season Liarsky is tops on the Blues and second in the league with an average of 4.24 kills per game.

That's a great number but, considering Liarsky's background, maybe they need to think of a different name for the statistic. When you've spent days running to a bomb shelter every few hours, kills just doesn't have a nice ring to it.

In her hometown of Haifa, Israel, the word kills meant

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NEWS photo Paul McGrath

CAPILANO College's Marina Liarsky makes a pass during BCCAA action this season. Liarsky, who leads the team in kills, moved to North Vancouver when violence hit her hometown of Haifa, Israel.

Liarsky wants to bring mother to Canada

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and who knew little English.

It may have been tough then but now the bubbly, personable 19-year-old seems like many Canadian teenaged girls — chatty. Wearing a dark grey hooded sweatshirt to match her long, dark hair, Liarsky lights up as she describes the path that led her here.

“That’s a funny story,” she says with a laugh. While still a high school student Liarsky came to visit her father for two weeks and found herself bored.

“I’m here and I’m not doing anything. I mean, I have to do some sports, so I asked my dad to go and just make some phone calls and find out what’s going on,” she says. Her father called St. Thomas Aquinas volleyball coach Chris Spence and Liarsky, a junior national team player in Israel, was soon on the Capilano College court playing a high school tournament with STA.

“I still remember,” she says, gesturing at the shiny hardwood floor and wide halls of the Sportsplex, “it was the same, everything was the same.”

Along with giving Liarsky something to do to pass the time, the tournament also put her together with the man who would smooth her transition from bomb shelter to the BCCAA.

“I met Desj,” she says, using her nickname for Capilano coach Wayne Desjardins (it rhymes with beige). “When I finished my

Grade 12 I told my dad I wanted to come to Canada and live here. So he contacted UBC and he contacted Cap and just called a bunch of universities and colleges. And then he talked to Desj and Desj told him that he had a spot on the team and I knew Desj so I decided to come to Cap.”

And there it is, a funny story — and one that has turned into a great success story for Liarsky thanks in large part, she says, to the man she calls Desj.

“He’s not only helped me improve my volleyball skills but he’s also helped me with my language difficulties. He’s trying to teach me a word every single day,” she says, laughing again. “I’m thinking of studying nursing and unfortunately Cap doesn’t offer this program. So I still don’t know what I want to do (but) I still want to stay for another year because I just love Desj, I want him to be my coach for another year.”

So life is good for the transplanted volleyball smasher. The one nagging concern, however, is the thought of her friends and, particularly, her mother, still potentially in harm’s way in Israel.

“It’s hard but I know they want me to be here. Even though I really want to see them — it’s really painful — but I have to move on, I have to establish a base here and then make my mom come here, force her,” she says, again with a laugh.

As an only child — “I’m not spoiled though,” she quickly adds — Liarsky’s only immediate

family member left back home is her mother and Liarsky is serious about bringing her here. “I think that would be the best for her.”

Israel was home, she says, but this place, too, feels like home.

“There are so many opportunities, that’s why I really want to stay here,” she says. “My plan is to stay here for as long as I can, basically. I need to get my citizenship here and, I don’t know, I think if I start to study nursing I’m going to stay here for sure.”

Schooling and job opportunities are draws that are keeping Liarsky in Canada but there is another one that is vital.

“People are really calm here. Everything is so quiet and peaceful. Israel is more intense, it’s more pressure, more stress because of the political situation,” she says. Living here, Liarsky says, she is through with politics for now.

“I’m done. Since I came to Canada I’m like, ‘No, not anymore. I don’t want to know about anything.’ I’m not going to forget, but I don’t want to start dealing with that stuff again.”

It’s nice to be in a place where kills are notched with a well-placed spike rather than a rocket or a tank.

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The Blues resume their season Jan. 11 and 12 with a set of home games. On Friday they play College of the Rockies at 6 p.m. and Saturday they play Selkirk starting at 1 p.m. Men’s games follow the women’s matches.