

Greater Lowell volleyball player Justin Tejada enjoying breakout season

Second-year letterman more than doubles offensive numbers for tourney-bound squad



Greater Lowell Tech junior Justin Tejada has registered 280 kills, 153 digs and 30 aces this season. His 235 serves received are among the best on the team, to go along with 36 blocks. He more than doubled his kills from last season. (Christopher Hurley/Lowell Sun)



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TYNGSBORO — Justin Tejada has no problems being the man in the middle.

In fact, he thrives on it.

The 6-foot-3, 140-pound junior has come into his own at his newfound position, while helping guide the surging Greater Lowell Tech boys volleyball team to a terrific 18-2 regular season and a spot in the upcoming state tournament.

“I think we look good going in,” said Tejada, 17. “I feel we have a very strong offense. Our defense is getting up there. I think no matter what we play together as a team.”

Led by senior tri-captains Mamady Camara, Ason Oeun and Ayden Young, the Gryphons are determined to maintain their winning ways after enduring an early first-round exit last season. Tejada likes his team’s chances.

“We’re way better compared to last year,” said Tejada, a Lowell resident. “This team would dominate our team last year, especially our hitters. Position-wise everyone is solid.”

Tejada has certainly held up his end of the bargain. The middle blocker/outside hitter has registered 280 kills, 153 digs and 30 aces. His 235 serves received are among the best on the team, to go along with 36 blocks. He more than doubled his kills count of 120 set last year.

“It’s been amazing,” said Tejada. “When the season first started, I wasn’t getting a lot of kills. I think I was focusing too much on my numbers from last year. But I found when I stopped thinking about it, I was really able to lock in.”

Not bad for a second-year letterman who was discovered innocently enough walking down the halls at Greater Lowell Tech. Coach Nate Howe spotted the tall student one day, and quickly tracked him down, inviting him to tryout.

“I was coming from lunch when he grabbed me and pulled me aside,” said Tejada, who previously played football as a safety and wide receiver. “He asked if I played any sports in the spring and if I’d try out for volleyball. He needed someone my height. I kind of laughed it off. I’d never even heard of volleyball before and never played it.”

It wasn’t until he found out that George Robles, an old friend from middle school, was also going to try out that he decided to give it a shot. The rest is history.

“It was a very fun experience,” said Tejada. “So, I kept playing.”

Tejada acclimated well in his first year with the team. Greater Lowell enjoyed an 11-8 run before bowing out to Agawam, 3-0, in the first round of the Division 2 State Tournament.

The Gryphons entered the new season determined to make much more of a dent in the standings and didn’t disappoint, posting their best win totals since Howe first joined the team five years ago.

“At the beginning of the season, coach saw 20 winnable games,” said Tejada. “And even though we didn’t get 20 it’s still the highest we’ve achieved. It’s really about our connection. Most of us played club or at the local park. My setter and I played club a

couple years in a row and really connected in a lot of ways. We can run special plays, especially when things are tight. We can pull off that tricky stuff.”

Howe’s hallway hunch has since proved pivotal, as the team was able to add Tejeda’s talents to an ever-growing arsenal.

“I think Justin’s the best middle hitter in the state, and he’s only a junior,” said Howe. “As a player, Justin looks sort of unassuming. He’s very nonchalant on the court, but once play starts, his impact is felt all over. He can jump higher than anyone I’ve seen, so he gets some eye-popping kills, but he’s an all-around player. He’s second on the team in digs and is a great passer and setter for a middle. He gets kills from all three spots in the front row and from the middle back but plays mainly middle for his great defense. He’s just a kid who loves volleyball.”

Tejeda now plays volleyball year-round, developing a still burgeoning skill set. It is fueled by a hard work ethic, perseverance and a clear passion for the game. He continues to refine his skills on the court.

“I’ve adapted some other playing styles,” said Tejeda. “I figured out I had to jump and hit. Looking back at last year, I wasn’t really jumping or being smart with it. Especially now that I’m all around the court. I have more opportunities with the ball.”

And with the team entering tourney time, he expects to make the most of those opportunities.

“I think we’re going to go further than we did last year,” said Tejeda. “Everyone wants to win obviously, but I hope we can make it far with this team, especially with these seniors, because they are leaders. They’ve been a big part of this team.”



Greater Lowell Tech’s Justin Tejeda is a force for the boys volleyball team and a major reason the Gryphons are 18-2 entering the state tournament. (Christopher Hurley/Lowell Sun)