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Branchville High School Head Girls' Volleyball Coach Kelsey Hackworth, Assistant Volleyball Coach Rynne Crosby, and the 2026 Lady Yellow Jackets Varsity Girls' Volleyball Team

Branchville's Kelsey Hackworth Leads Lady Yellow Jackets Back to Championship Stage

ORANGEBURG, S.C. — For Branchville High School Head Volleyball Coach Kelsey Hackworth, Saturday's state championship matchup represents more than an opportunity to bring home another title. It is a full-circle moment years in the making. In 2019, during her senior year at Branchville High School, Hackworth experienced the unforgettable thrill of winning a state championship before graduating with the Class of 2020. Now, just six years after graduation, she finds herself on the other side of the court, this time as the head coach, with an opportunity to lead a new generation of Lady Jackets to that same championship glory. During her three years playing volleyball at Branchville, her teams advanced to the state championship each season, ultimately capturing the title in her final year. Those memories never left her and ultimately inspired her return to her alma mater. "I wanted to come back here to Branchville and have the girls have that opportunity, the same opportunity that I had," Hackworth shared. Her journey from championship-winning player to head coach is a powerful testament to hometown pride, dedication, and the lasting influence of high school athletics. Once a student-athlete chasing a championship, Hackworth now stands just one victory away from helping her own players experience the same dream she fulfilled in 2019.

The foundation for this season's success began long before the first official match. Throughout the summer, Hackworth focused on developing team chemistry, building relationships, and creating an environment where her players could trust one another. A team camp at Wofford College proved to be

a defining moment. Watching the Lady Yellow Jackets compete together for the first time, Hackworth recognized something special in their ability to communicate, encourage one another, and play as a united team. "That was the first time we ever played together as a team, and we were playing really good," she recalled. From that moment, she believed the Lady Yellow Jackets had an opportunity to accomplish something extraordinary.

But the road to the championship has demanded more than talent. Throughout the season, Branchville has faced challenging moments, including sets in which the team trailed by significant margins. Rather than allowing adversity to determine the outcome, the Lady Yellow Jackets repeatedly found ways to respond through determination, energy, and unwavering positivity. For Hackworth, those comeback efforts have demonstrated the character of a team unwilling to surrender when circumstances become difficult. "This was actually their goal. As a team, they set out to make it to the state championship this year, and they did just that," Hackworth explained. "I think it means the world to them."

As the Lady Yellow Jackets prepare to face the Governor's School for Science and Mathematics, Hackworth anticipates a highly competitive matchup between two accomplished programs. She recognizes the talent on both sides of the net and believes her team possesses the ability to compete at the championship level. Yet her preparation extends beyond physical conditioning and strategy. She has intentionally worked to balance focused practices with opportunities for her players to enjoy the game, reminding them that their relationships and shared experiences are just as important as their performance. "I try to tell them to keep it fun as much as possible, and to smile, because it's more than just volleyball," she said. That philosophy reflects what Hackworth considers one of the team's greatest strengths: a group of young women who consistently encourage, support, and uplift one another, both on and off the court.

Hackworth, credits her faith for guiding her back to the school and community that helped shape her. Although another championship would be a remarkable achievement, she hopes her players will carry something even greater into their futures. "I hope they remember that it's more than volleyball. The friendships that you make and the memories that you make," she shared.

Regardless of the final score, their journey has already demonstrated the power of perseverance, unity, and belief. For a coach who once stood exactly where her players stand today, the opportunity to lead them back to the championship stage is a victory with meaning far beyond the final score. This Saturday, November 7, at 10 a.m., the Branchville Lady Yellow Jackets will face the Governor's School for Science and Mathematics in the state championship at Dreher High School in Columbia, South Carolina. Tickets for Saturday's state championship matchup can be purchased online at https://gofan.co/event/7020727?schoolId=SCHSL.

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