

CALEDONIA – Mary Beth Edmondson hoped the news was going to be uplifting.

Instead, the seventh-grader who dreamed one day of playing for the Caledonia volleyball program looked at the letter and was devastated she didn't make the squad.

“That made her work even harder,” said Jenny Edmondson, Mary Beth's mother. “She is not a quitter. She has *no* quit in her.”

Edmondson spent a year as manager for the CHS volleyball team before she made the squad the following year. That step kicked off a journey that saw Edmondson polish her skills and continue to improve.

All of that improvement culminated Thursday in another big step, as Edmondson celebrated her decision to play volleyball at Beville State Community College in Alabama at a signing ceremony at Caledonia High.

Edmondson said the signing was “unexpected” because she wasn't sure if any coaches would be interested in her, but she said it was gratifying because she has always thought about playing volleyball at the next level.

“I am excited to see all of the teams and to be able to represent Caledonia,” Edmondson said. “I hope people see me as a good player because I *am* from Caledonia.”

Edmondson joins classmates Brianna Holliman and Wiselee Collier (both Itawamba C.C. in Fulton) in extending her volleyball career. This season, Edmondson, Holliman and Collier were part of a senior class with Emma McKee, who was named the inaugural C Spire Miss Volleyball for Class 4A, Rylee Jernigan, Hailey Harris, Kaitlyn Truelock, Sophie Johnson and Jessica Horton that led Caledonia to a 28-11-1 record and the third round of the Mississippi High School Activities

Association Class 4A State Tournament, where they lost to Newton County. In 2022, that group helped Caledonia win the school's first volleyball state title.

CHS volleyball coach Samantha Brooks said Edmondson worked hard every year to get to the point where as a senior she won the team's spirit award, coach's award and leadership award. She said Edmondson honed her skills throughout her seventh-grade year while tending to her duties as manager and that she is elated to see her reap the rewards.

"She has brought so much energy to the team over the years," Brooks said. "The last two years she has earned our spirit award, which is voted on by her peers. This year, she was voted team captain. She is selfless. She is one of the most selfless players I have coached. She truly believes there is no I in team."

Brooks also said Edmondson has helped with the youth YMCA class she teaches every spring and that the girls "absolutely love her."

Edmondson's love for volleyball helped her persevere after being devastated as a seventh-grader. She said had played volleyball before the seventh grade and that she had attended camps and done different things with Brooks. Edmondson also said her mother told her she didn't want her to be manager again if she didn't make the team as an eighth-grader because she saw how not making the team affected her.

"It was definitely difficult being manager my first year because all I wanted to do was play," said Edmondson, a 5-foot-9 front-row player. "That definitely pushed me to work hard throughout the summer. When I did make the team, I never stopped working hard and kept going and going."

“I knew this was going to be part of my life. Even as a manager, I couldn’t see myself without volleyball. I just knew it wasn’t going to be something I put into the past.”

Jenny Edmondson admitted it was “very difficult” watching Mary Beth’s face when she read the letter informing her she didn’t make the team. But she said Mary Beth “fought and fought”, poured her heart into the sport she loved and, ultimately, found a way to turn devastation into celebration.

“She was born early, so she has been a fighter since day one,” Jenny Edmondson said. “She doesn’t give up easily. She prays about everything, and if this wasn’t the direction she was supposed to go, she knew she needed to stop, but she knew she loved that ball as soon as she held it and she wanted to play volleyball.”