



CELEBRATING THUNDER ATHLETES

Part One



Thunder at the Matt Hartner Classic in Eugene, Oregon. (January 2020)

January 2, 2021. Happy New Year! We hope you have enjoyed the holiday with family.

As we celebrate 21 years of growth and success as a club, Thunder is very proud of the leadership and contributions of our teams and players. Success as a whole is measured by enjoying the process, hard work, dedication, and endless hours spent on the court with teammates. While some Thunder players continue with post-secondary opportunities, we applaud the efforts of all our players in their pursuit to play volleyball to their highest potential. As the great Kobe Bryant said, “The mindset isn’t about seeking a result – it’s more about the process of getting to that result. It’s about the journey and the approach.”

We begin this club season with a series of articles that identify the many successes achieved by our Thunder members. In the first of this series, we honour the Thunder athletes who are in their final year of club. We asked these athletes a range of questions and without a doubt they have shared powerful messages for all Thunder players. We also want to acknowledge that over the years, many Thunder athletes have been named to Varsity Letter’s BC’S Top 15 Volleyball Players. We’ve included a list of these players from 2017-2020.

As athletes start and continue their club careers, volleyball will help write proud new chapters in each of their lives; chapters for which we will always be grateful. When we find ourselves in special moments, the kind we never forget, the kind where you ask yourself, “Is this real?”, we quietly tell ourselves that everything starts with a dream. Stay safe and stay tuned for Part Two of this series later in the month.

CELEBRATING THUNDER ATHLETES - PART ONE

Charley Baker



School Commitment: *Queens University (OUA) Academic Program:* Economics

Why did you choose to attend Queens?

A: I chose Queen's University because of their outstanding academics, fun, and tight-knit community, and their competitive athletic environment. Queen's immediately felt like the right fit for me, as it has the best atmosphere. I can't wait to train with some of the best players and coaches in the country and become a Gael!

Outside of volleyball, what is something you are passionate about and why?

A: I am passionate about outdoors and love spending time in nature, especially at my cabin - I love BC and all the features from sea-to-sky that I get to interact with regularly.

Do you have any pre-tournament/pre-practice rituals? If so, what are they?

A: Listening to a pump-up playlist to get fired up before tournaments and practices, and I like to visualize while I put my gear on.

What is your favorite memory from Club?

A: My favourite memory from club was competing against Thunder u18s in our first Super Series as a u17 team, and realizing the potential our team had, it was a very exciting moment for all of us!

If you could give any advice to Younger Thunder Athletes what would it be?

A: What the suspension of our season from COVID taught us as U18s is to enjoy the process, the journey, the coaching and the friendships - never take our sport for granted! Every practice and game are a memory!

Lucy Borowski



School Commitment: *UBC (CanWest) Academic Program:* Kinesiology

Why did you choose to attend UBC?

A: UBC has a very successful volleyball program and coaches that I love working with. The team was very welcoming when I went to visit. As well, I've heard great things about the faculty of Kinesiology and can't wait to study there!

Outside of volleyball, what's something you're passionate about and why?

A: I love playing beach in the summer, hanging out with friends, and cooking/baking random things

Do you have any pre-tournament/pre-practice rituals? If so, what are they?

A: I don't really have any pre-game rituals, but our team always listens to music together before games.

What is your favorite memory from Club?

A: In my 16u year, we got to play the other Thunder team in Provincial finals and won. I was lucky to be a part of such a great group of girls who had so much fun together. That was a season I'll never forget.

If you could give any advice to Younger Thunder Athletes what would it be?

A: My advice to younger athletes is to believe in yourself fully and be a good teammate. Coaches notice who's shagging balls and positively impacting the team. If you want to play in university, keep working hard because you never know how much you can achieve!

Jaeya Brach



School Commitment: *University of Western Ontario (OUA) Academic Program:* Health Sciences with Biology or Kinesiology

Why did you choose to attend Western?

A: Western has a great volleyball program, a good academic reputation and a supportive community. Coach Melissa made me feel welcomed from the first time I had called her. The girls on the team seem like great people and I am beyond excited to call myself a mustang!

Outside of volleyball, what's something you're passionate about and why?

A: I play beach volleyball during the summers, I love to coach little kids, and I love spending time with my friends and family; trying new restaurants and exploring Vancouver.

Do you have any pre-tournament/pre-practice rituals? If so, what are they?

A: I play my music super loud in the car on the way to a tournament/practice. Dancing is a must; it helps me calm my nerves and puts me in the zone.

What is your favorite memory from Club?

A: My favourite memory from club was going to Oregon at the start of our 17U season. We got to play high level teams from the USA and made super fun memories in the hotel and when we explored the city.

If you could give any advice to Younger Thunder Athletes what would it be?

A: Don't worry about only the outcome, the memories you make in hotel rooms with your teammates and singing on the bus ride to tournaments is what you will remember most. It also feels like I was just starting 14U a month ago so don't take any practice or reps for granted; it's going to go by really fast.

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Sophie Fernback



School Commitment: Guelph (OUA)
Academic Program: Human Kinetics

Why did you choose to attend Guelph?

A: I chose to attend the University of Guelph because of the competitive volleyball team with an amazing coach and team dynamic. I'm looking forward to the great campus life that I have heard so much about, and the innovative Human Kinetics program. I'm excited to live close to family in Ontario, and to play games against friends at nearby schools.

Outside of volleyball, what's something you're passionate about and why?

A: Outside of volleyball, I love to get outside and spend time with my friends and family especially hiking and biking. I also love to travel and experience new cultures. There are so many places that I can't wait to visit once the pandemic is over!

Do you have any pre-tournament/pre-practice rituals? If so, what are they?

A: Before games I love listening to music and socializing with my teammates. It gets us energized, and allows us to have fun and get out any nerves before we step on the court.

What is your favorite memory from Club?

A: Although there are many, one of my favourite memories from club is playing in the Matt Hartner Classic in Eugene, Oregon. It was a great way to start out the season and bond with my team. The US teams were some really good competition. Even though the 9 hour bus ride seems like it would be torture, it was actually one of my favourite memories from the weekend. It was filled with music, games, movies and more that made our team even closer.

If you could give any advice to Younger Thunder Athletes what would it be?

A: My advice to younger players would be to never give up if you feel discouraged. There may be challenges and disappointments along the way, but always remember that if you put in the hard work, you can achieve any goal, and sometimes these things make you stronger.

Lauren Johnson



School Commitment: McGill (RSEQ)
Academic Program: Sciences

Why did you choose to attend McGill?

A: When I was first going through the recruiting process and figuring out where I wanted to go for university, my number one priority was finding a school where I would want to go academically. Sciences and Medicine are the fields of study I want to pursue, and McGill has one of the top science programs and Med schools in the country. As well, the volleyball program has been coached by a very accomplished coach who has been at the helm for over a decade – and developed many successful student athletes and has fostered a culture of both achieving in sports and academics.

Outside of volleyball, what's something you're passionate about and why?

A: Health and wellness are areas that I am passionate about. As a whole, we generally undermine the importance of the mind on how we think, act and excel. For school, I did research projects on the science of happiness and longevity and I like to listen to podcasts and read books on mindfulness and behavioral science and psychology. The practice of mindfulness and meditation have been very helpful to me and I know I will need to continue to make this a part of my life

and I will need to turn to it when I am trying to navigate and strive for whatever I am trying to achieve. The pursuit of goals and aspirations can be filled with fear and anxiety, but they do not have to be – I work at finding a more joyful balance.

Do you have any pretournament/Pre-practice rituals? If so, what are they?

A: My pre-tournament rituals are that I will usually watch game footage of an NCAA or U sport team to get into a volleyball mindset and start my visualization process the night before. I visualize myself as my volleyball inspirations like Courtney Thompson and Jenna Gray. Before both practice and tournaments, I will always play a pump-up playlist to get jacked for the session so I can start getting in the zone. I play better when I am competing, and I get out of my own head, so I try to get into a competitive mindset and get into 'character'.

What is your favorite memory from Club?

A: This past club season, we went down to Oregon for a tournament. This was our first tournament of the season and my first time playing with Thunder and it was really exciting to play in that atmosphere and get to know all the girls way better. Being down in the states and playing against really high-level teams was a really cool experience.

If you could give any advice to Younger Thunder Athletes what would it be?

A: Hard work trumps everything. Hard work and perseverance will get you to where you want to go, but you have to enjoy the journey. Do not be afraid to fail look bad. Failure is the pathway to improvement. In order to improve and get where you want to go requires putting in the time and working on the stuff that you are not good at – on and off the court. Striving at every practice to be better than the last. You also have to enjoy that process and you have to put yourself out there. Watch and learn from the experts and those that are doing it right and emulate them. Seek feedback and do not settle. Enjoy the fight. It is not just that coaches notice the player who works their butt off to make that dig and keep the ball alive, it is the internal joy and satisfaction that you get when you are that player. My mindset is that even if I might be the worst player or I am not having the best practice, I still want to be the most hardworking athlete on the court.

CELEBRATING THUNDER ATHLETES - PART ONE

Tamara Jurosevic



School Commitment: McGill (RSEQ)
Academic Program: Economics

Why did you choose to attend McGill?

A: I chose McGill because of the opportunity to continue my volleyball career at one of the top universities in Canada. I connected really well with the coach and the team, and I couldn't be more excited to live in Montreal!

Outside of volleyball, what's something you're passionate about and why?

A: Since I was a kid, I have always been passionate about helping people. Throughout high school, I have pursued my passion through smaller local projects and the little things that can make a difference. In the future, I hope to become a lawyer so that I can help people on a larger scale.

Do you have any pre-tournament/pre-practice rituals? If so, what are they?

A: First stretch, and then listen to loud music on the ride there to get hyped up before the practice or tournament.

What is your favorite memory from Club?

A: My favorite memory from club is 16U provincials. Although we lost in the finals and I got injured, the team felt like a family. I have never felt more connected with all the girls on the team, and it was such a positive supportive environment from every girl to each other, it was something special.

If you could give any advice to Younger Thunder Athletes what would it be?

A: Don't be afraid to make mistakes. Come into every practice with a growth mindset, take in what your coaches tell you, and don't stress about the little mistakes. The end results from a tournament or even provincials at a younger age won't matter in the long run, so do everything you can to improve as a player and build up your confidence!

Marie Leggett



School Commitment: Mount Royal University (CanWest)

Academic Program: Business/Psychology

Why did you choose to attend MRU?

A: Of the schools I was considering, MRU's approach to athletics and academics best fit my personal philosophies. Since the first phone call, their holistic approach to their team culture and dynamics set them apart from my other conversations very fast.

Outside of volleyball, what's something

A: Other than volleyball, I'm passionate about doing creative activities that can help me wind and calm down when I need it because being a student athlete is so stimulating.

Do you have any pre-tournament/pre-practice rituals? If so, what are they?

A: I always listen to music on the way (genre depending on my mood and if it needs to be brought up or down). When I get to the gym, I put on my gear and do a warm-up called 4 Minute Magic (a yoga-like activation routine that takes 4 minutes and really is quite magical). Then I just do my standard on-court and ball warm up.

What is your favorite memory from Club?

A: Probably winning the 2019 16U Provincials at the last full club season because the journey to get there and the team's dynamic was awesome.

If you could give any advice to Younger Thunder Athletes what would it be?

A: Put volleyball and your reason for playing it into perspective. Stop giving power to the outcomes of things; focus on getting better and don't be afraid to make mistakes. You hear it a lot from coaches, but when you fully internalize it, volleyball becomes much more fun (which is the whole reason for playing), and you get much better faster. Everyone knows how

to celebrate success and good plays; it's the ability to put the mistakes into perspective that can be lacking, that can ruin the momentum and validation of the good work. All of a sudden, your hyper focus on the outcome of the mistake (eg. a set being a meter off, a pass a meter too tight), changes to a focus on the reason why it went wrong, acceptance that you tried your best, and how you're going to try your best to do it better next time. When you have that healthy positive self-talk, you'll see that the outcomes start to get better...while having fun?! Crazy, right?

2020 BC Top 15 Athlete Rankings:

2 - Lucy Borowski

4 - Jaeya Brach

14 (tie) - Claire Stewart

Honorable Mentions - Tamara Jurosevic

2019 BC Top 15 Athlete Rankings:

1 - Katarina Pantovic

6 - Akash Grewal

7 - Natalie Davidson

Honorable Mentions - Fiona Bayfield, Sara Ostojic

2018 BC Top 15 Athlete Rankings:

2 - Jady van Santen

7 - Shea Baker

13 - Hanna Kolof

Honorable Mentions - Maya Griffith

2017 BC Top 15 Athlete Rankings:

1 - Kayla Oxland

4 - Sydney Grills

5 - Savannah Casterino-Leger

6 - Brynn Pasin

7 - Danika Cowie

9 - Cara Kovacs