

## VanDyke Signs With Bluefield

Written by Mike Kelly

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Watauga High senior Ashlyn VanDyke made it official Thursday afternoon as she signed her national letter of intent with Bluefield College, an NAIA school in Bluefield, Va., and a member of the

Mid-South Conference. VanDyke also joins two former teammates in Colby Combs and Anna Church, who are currently freshmen with the Rams.

VanDyke is the third Pioneers' player to sign with Bluefield in the last two years.

"You're always looking for talented players, and Watauga has talented players," Bluefield coach Brian Votaw said. "I am very pleased with the players we picked up last season (Combs and Church), and Ashlyn has the talent to play at this level. I really watched her play a lot during the club season and she has what it takes. I'm very excited that she is a part of our program."

VanDyke earned her way into the starting lineup midway through last year. And she's been a regular ever since.

"Ashlyn became more vocal on the floor, and she's not afraid to sacrifice her body on the floor," said WHS coach Kris Hagaman. "She brings a lot of energy to our team, and I strongly believe she will succeed at the next level because of her hard work and attitude."

VanDyke was impressed with Bluefield last season, and she verbally committed in April. She just made up her mind, then and there, that Bluefield was the place for her.

"I went up there and I felt very comfortable," she said. "Plus, knowing the Colby and Anna are going there made it that much easier for me. Those two really helped me adjust at this level. They really helped me with my game and my confidence. And I spoken with Colby, and she told me how exciting it was to be playing up there. That just sold me on the school. I'm very happy with my decision."

Combs and Church have been forced into duty this season because of injury. And, despite being true freshmen, those two have been strong contributors to a Rams program looking to turn its fortunes around. And Votaw feels VanDyke will be a strong contributor as well.

"I don't know what her playing status will be," he said. "But, whether she beats someone out, or she gets playing time because of injury, I'm very confident Ashlyn can step in and play, and she can play well. We've had our share of injuries this season. I'm down to my fourth libero this season because of injuries. You never know what might happen during the course of a season. And I have a lot of confidence in Ashlyn, and I'm also a strong believer that you can't have too much defense."

"I still have to play a little faster, and I have to be more consistent on the floor," VanDyke said. "It's another challenge for me, but I'm confident it will all work out with time and experience. I just have to keep working at it."

The WHS volleyball team (12-7 overall; 7-2 and tied for second place with Fred T. Foard in the Northwestern 3A/4A Conference) travels to Enka for a tri-match on Saturday. The Pioneers will play Enka and West Henderson.