

## Ledford's Leonard signs with Lees-McRae

Written by Michael Lyndsay

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Haylee Leonard enjoys volleyball, whether it's playing, coaching or just being around the game. So, into college, she knew she'd continue to play, perhaps on the club team. But, instead, Leonard, a senior at Ledford, has signed with NCAA Division II school Lees-McRae College to continue her varsity career. "I'm excited to play a different level of volleyball," says Leonard, the daughter of Jeff and Dana of Wallburg. "It's not just high school or J.O. — it's more competitive. It's exciting because it's going to be new and not just the same."

She began playing volleyball in the sixth grade, playing in a middle school league in Wallburg. The speed, the action and the power of the game, plus the teamwork, just triggered something in her.

"You never meet a person who plays volleyball that isn't like, 'I absolutely love it,'" she says. "Everybody has that passion for the game, and it's a great team game where everyone has to play together. You're never just sitting there, waiting for the game — it keeps going. You feel powerful when you hit, but you can also feel powerful when you dig. There are so many elements to the game — it isn't just one thing."

In high school, Leonard, a middle hitter for the Panthers, was asked to play on the varsity team as a sophomore. Combined with her play at the Junior Olympic level, she found her knack as a standout volleyball player. She continued to work out and train hard — always in preparation for volleyball — and even coached at the middle-school level, earning all-conference honors for her play during her junior and senior seasons.

"Haylee has a lot of natural ability, but she also has the passion and the drive to do things on the court," Ledford coach Megan Mayhew says. "She knew from the start that this is what she wanted to do. She definitely has been a big contributor to the Ledford program over the last several years. She has great leadership qualities and is a player by example. So, she will definitely be missed."

In looking at school, Leonard wanted to go to a college in the mountains, considering schools like King College or Tusculum College. But she chose the Bobcats, who have won two of the last three Conference Carolinas titles.

"I fell in love with Lees-McRae," says Leonard, who committed in the fall and wants to study communication arts. "It's just so beautiful, all the stone buildings — just very homey."