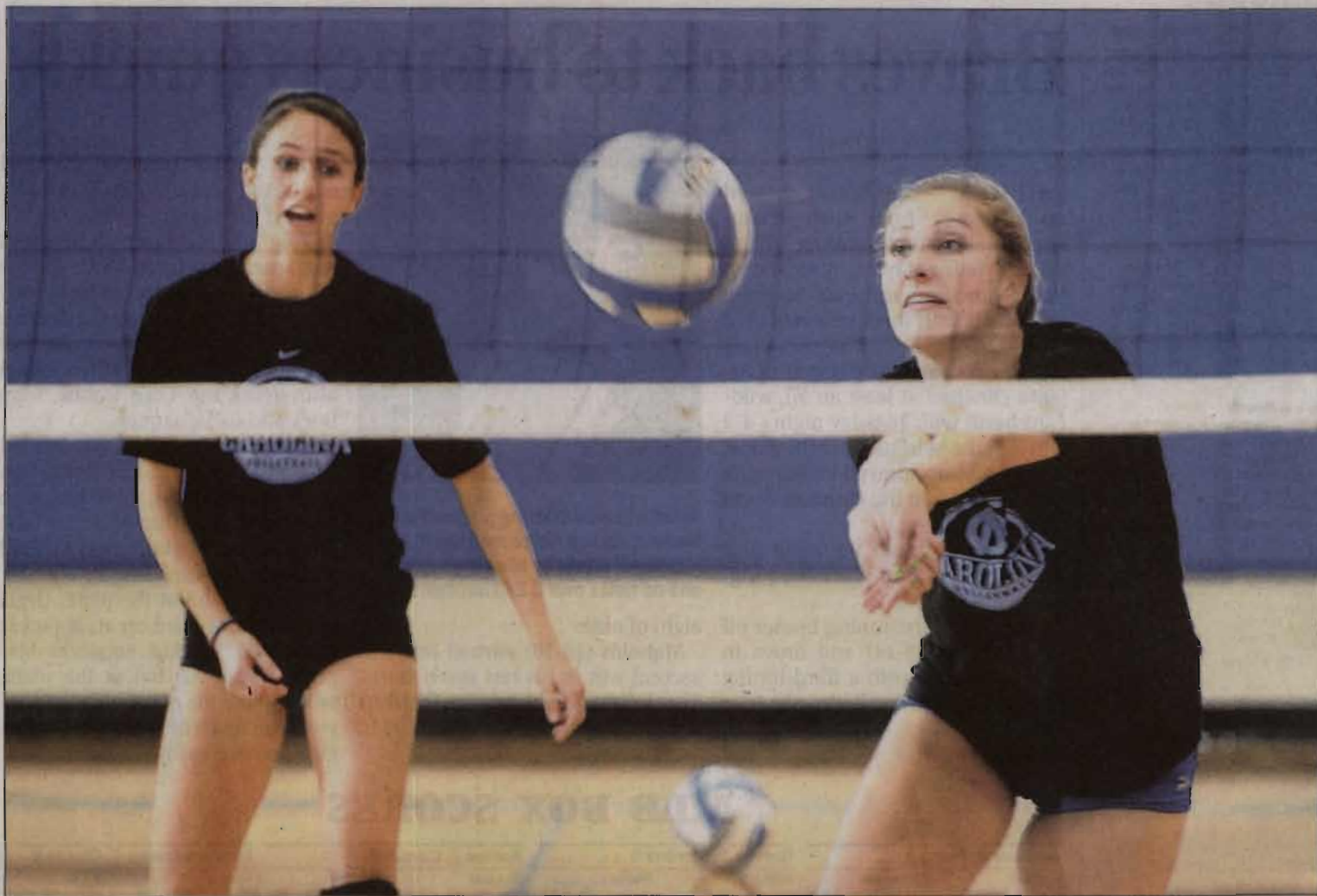


## E.C. GLASS VOLLEYBALL



SAM O'KEEFE/THE NEWS & ADVANCE

**E.C. Glass senior outside hitter Cristina Good (left) and middle hitter Sarah Thomas work on digging and passing drills at practice on Wednesday afternoon. The two neighbors and best friends also compete in the same strokes on the Hilltoppers' swim team and start in the midfield for the soccer team.**

# Spikers show off soccer skills

## Three-sport teammates Good, Thomas form potent duo at net

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Even when they're not lined up side-by-side on the front row for E.C. Glass's volleyball team, senior middle hitter Sarah Thomas and outside hitter Cristina Good are practically inseparable.

They grew up in the same neighborhood playing sports year-round on the same volleyball and soccer travel teams, even swimming the same strokes for the Peakland Otters.

"We're kind of attached at the hip," Good said.

That's the way it seems for the Hilltoppers' five seniors this fall, all starters and best friends.

"This is one of the more tight-knit teams we've played on..." Good said, before Thomas completed her thought, "...because we've all been playing together since the sixth grade, which is crucial."

For Thomas and Good, the three sports they compete in at Glass go hand-in-hand.

Swimming backstroke and freestyle events keeps them in excellent cardio-vascular shape for their two primary sports. Volleyball (Thomas's best sport) helps them with their footwork and reflexes for soccer (Good's favorite), where they both utilize those skills as starting midfielders and backup goalkeepers.

Sometimes the lines between volleyball and soccer become blurred.

In Tuesday's home match against Amherst, Good instinctively kicked a freeball over the net for a winner early in the decisive fourth game.

"That was kind of embarrassing, but I got the point, so it was OK," said Good, whose awkward kill came moments after senior libero Ali Johnson made a kick save to keep a point alive. "Soccer is my natural go-to sport, so leaning in for the kick was pretty natural for me. We had two kicks tonight so I guess it's not illegal. It worked for us."

Glass coach David Cardwell said volleyball rules used to prohibit players from using any part of their body other than their arms and hands to make a play on the ball.

"They changed that rule two or three seasons ago," Cardwell said. "Now, as long as it doesn't hit the floor ... whatever it takes to get it up."

"It's kind of a natural defense [reaction] to get that foot up," he added. "It's kind of unexpected when you do it. The other team kind of freezes like, 'You can't do that.' But you can."

Things have been falling in the Hilltoppers' favor for the most part this season, as they are off to a 10-2 start, 5-0 in Seminole District play, with their only two losses against Group AAA schools Albemarle (10-0) and former Western Valley District rival Patrick Henry.

Cardwell said senior setter Paige Riley is making smart decisions in distributing the ball to a variety of talented hitters, keeping everyone involved in the offense.

"She has a lot of different choices and a lot of spots to go to," Cardwell said. "She basically quarterbacks it out. We really don't have a weak hitter anywhere on the floor. We can mix it up."

A central midfielder in soccer, Thomas plays mostly middle hitter in volleyball.

"Sarah's pretty much our dominant hitter, definitely," Good said of Thomas, who has 158 kills, 38 blocks and 23 aces. "She's the go-

to player [in both sports]."

Despite her small stature, the 5-foot-6 Good (94 kills, 116 digs, 22 aces) can be just as big an impact hitter on the outside, where she platoons with Alyssa Morris, (103 kills, 18 blocks) and Katherine George.

"All of our hitters are really strong this year," said Riley, who has distributed 372 assists. "I have a lot of good options. As long as we're running our system each time and we get a pretty decent pass, we should get it down almost every time."

Thomas, who normally rotates with juniors Kelsey Plankeel and Cynthia Beasley in the middle, often shifts over to the right side. That's especially true when the Hilltoppers run their motion offense using slides and zips, plays set up by Riley designed to help Thomas find openings around opposing middle blockers.

"Sarah has good power, but she hits the ball smart, which is a great asset," Cardwell said. "She's not a real big player, size-wise, but she thinks quick with the ball, and she can cut the ball right and left and go around blocks."

When Riley missed a few matches last season due to an ankle sprain, the 5-10 Thomas even shifted from middle hitter to setter, taking away one of the Hilltoppers' top hitters.

"Sarah's one of those players, she could play anywhere on the front row or the back row," Cardwell said. "She's a great passer."

Good played on defense with former middle hitter Meg Kenny as a freshman before moving up to forward and back to midfield, showing she is just as versatile on the soccer field as Thomas is on the volleyball court.

That's not to say the two seniors are competitive with each other or anything. Though they could pass for sisters, they're definitely best friends, not sibling, rivals.