



North Jersey's Female Athlete of the Week feels at home on the court

Sean Farrell

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Zuzanna Buchnajzer used to watch movies to learn the English language. When it came to learning about Tenafly, volleyball helped do the trick.

Buchnajzer moved from Poland to Manhattan when she was 14, then came across the river a year later. Like so many immigrants, Buchnajzer started building a connection with her new classmates

through sports. She was welcomed onto the volleyball team even before she set foot on campus.

"The girls from the team started contacting me and my sister through social media like Instagram," Buchnajzer said. "When I moved to Tenafly, my friend group was only from volleyball."

Buchnajzer looks right at home on the court for Tenafly. She took up the sport in middle school in her hometown Łódź, about 80 miles west of the Polish capital Warsaw.

By now, the 6-foot senior has become a dominant outside hitter for one of Bergen County's best programs. She picked up 45 kills last week in three straight-set victories.

The most impressive win came on Saturday when the Tigers knocked off state champion Northern Valley/Demarest.

"We were very excited to win," Buchnajzer said. "We prepared for two whole practices. We scouted every play and every single player."

Growing up, Buchnajzer tried everything from skiing to tennis to dance, but volleyball always seem to stick. She is committed to play at Division II Quincy University in Illinois and plans to study marketing.

Buchnajzer came to the United States in the summer of 2018 when her dad was transferred to a new job. It was bittersweet to say goodbye to almost everyone they knew in Poland.

"I was very sad to leave my best friends and my family because I'm only here with my parents and my (older) sister," she said. "But I felt like it's worth it for the experience."

What helped Buchnajzer was her command of the English language. It was a big focus in her elementary school, so she was further along than the average citizen. By the time she came overseas, she was fluent enough to write essays and communicate in class.

"Before I moved, I took lessons and watched movies in English," Buchnajzer said. "I feel like I sped up my learning process."

This year, the Tigers (8-2, ranked No. 10) have proven to be fast learners at the net. Buchnajzer is one of a few seniors on a sophomore-laden team. She is savoring the wins and the friendships she's developed off the court.

"I feel like it's very calming for me," Buchnajzer said. "I love hanging out with the team. Even though winning is so great and amazing, I feel like my favorite memories are actually when we come back from the practice and drive together someplace."

Zuzanna Buchnajzer

Sport: Volleyball

School: Tenafly

Class: Senior **Age:** 17

Accomplishment: Buchnajzer helped the Tigers win in straight sets in all three matches last week. In total, she had 45 kills, 22 service points, 23 digs and 10 assists.

Also nominated: Olivia Coughlin of Immaculate Heart, Esmae Oehler of Northern Highlands, Cammi Quirk of Ridgewood and Yishi Huang of Fort Lee for volleyball.