Jeff Billington says that "the libero must wear a uniform shirt or jersey that is immediately recognizable from all angles as being in clear contrast to and distinct from the other members of the team." That would be the official reason why UNCP sophomore Marissa Baker stands out from her 13 teammates on the court.

But as much as her jersey helps her to stand out, anyone who has been to a Lady Braves volleyball match -- and surely her Lady Braves volleyball teammates and coaches -- will say that Baker is in her own world on the court. "Some are good, others are funny and the bad ones falter while certain ones stick. Baker has one of those," Billington adds. "If we look at the volleyball team, there is a mix of certain unique nicknames and those that are easily identifiable. Take in a match and the names you see on the roster aren't necessarily what you'll hear on the court."

Seniors Tricia Varno, Tiara Anderson and Rebecca Morgan go by Tiish, Tee and Becca, in a simple case of shortening their names, as is the case with sophomores Jennifer Gain- don’s calling of Jenn. Senior Heather Bolwerk simplifies it all by going with her initials H.B.

"Others are more interesting, as freshman Chelsea Phillips goes by Lu and junior transfer Sarah Borrow brought the nickname Bear with her to campus," Baker says. "Baker’s nickname has the ability to be both unique, and people instantly know who they are talking about."

"Some of the skills she has when she digs a ball or passing abilities don’t have to UNCP but at her height that size doesn’t translate well into becoming a front-line player in college." By the time she was at Pembroke, Baker knew of Billington’s plan for her to become the team’s libero.

"He wanted an all-around player, he let me know that right away," Baker says. "I think it’s more gratifying digging a kill than getting a kill. I’ve always thought that," Baker says of her defense.

In 15 matches through Sept. 24 this season, Baker has already tallied 256 digs. As a freshman, Baker finished second on the UNCP roster by playing in 109 sets out of a possible 122 in 2010, finishing only behind Bolwerk’s 117 sets played.

Baker finished with 506 digs last season, more than double that of the No. 2 player on the UNCP stat-book.

"I’m Red. I don’t even tell people my real name," Baker says. "I'm Red. I don't even tell them my real name," Baker says. "When you just relax and play the game, your body will instinctively react. That’s where Red has gotten to; she doesn’t think near as much (as last season)," Billington adds.

But Baker’s job is not only about digging the ball, it’s also about delivering a good pass to the UNCP setters as the Lady Braves go on the offensive attack.

She says her main objective is to “get the ball up” and that “it doesn’t always look pretty” as she moves on the court. After a brief pause, she laughs and adds, “I do have some cool flips sometimes, though.”

"Some of the skills she has when she digs a ball or passes a ball are so flawless that it gives everyone around her confidence," Billington says of Baker.

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