

2011 All-Metro Boys Volleyball

Albus named All-Metro player of year



Before the 2010 season, James River coach Terry Ford conducted a customary open gym for returning players and anyone interested in joining the volleyball team. At Mitchell Ford's invitation, Sam Albus attended. "It was a humbling experience playing with those guys," Albus said. "This is such a tough sport to pick up and all the guys I was playing with were amazing." Terry Ford saw a very good athlete with a lot of potential. In just his second year on the team, Albus has finished a dominating season by sweeping the Dominion District and Central Region top honors. He also is The Times-Dispatch All-Metro boys volleyball player of the year. Albus, a senior, is the second consecutive Rapid to win, following Darren Kilby. Each led James River to the Group AAA state championship. "I told Darren's father at the start of the season I didn't think we could win it again," Ford said. "Over time, I started to think it wouldn't be that crazy to win it again. The development of Sam is a big part of that." Albus' role in 2010 was to work off Kilby. "Oftentimes, I would draw the blockers and watch Darren go to work." This season, he was asked to do a lot more, and that was reflected by his statistics: 311 kills, 78 blocks, 61 digs and 55 aces. "We had him running about two plays by the end of last season," Ford said. "By the end of this season, we were running about seven plays with him. He had to learn to play in the back row." Albus said he worked hardest on serving and passing. "We'd have five or six passers practicing, and I would just crank jump serves," he said. "As inconsistent as my serving was, I think it helped the team. I had to serve for our lineup to reach maximum efficiency." Albus gives a lot of credit for his success to his teammates. "I think Kaeler (Sullivan), Pete (Sowers) and Harry (Tisdale) are all underrated," he said. "I didn't always have to get the kills all the time. You saw that in the tournament. I feel like I am taking too much credit." One of Albus' standout performances was a 33-kill effort in a five-game victory over Deep Run in the Central Region quarterfinals. "I love pressure," Albus explained. "It makes me feel comfortable. And last year, there was pressure, but it was not as much on me." Albus also plays for James River's basketball team. His athleticism is an important part of his success but not the most important. "I've seen a lot of great athletes play this game but do things that make it easy to stop them," Ford said. "Sam is very coachable. If you show him, he can do it. He's played with guys like Mitchell and Darren. Very few people can mimic people who can do that. Sam can hit around blockers and through the block. That makes it very hard to stop him." Albus said he's looking at college programs where he can play men's volleyball, but there are few in Virginia. "If you put him in an environment with better players and better coaching, his upside is unlimited," Ford said.

Past All-Metro Players of the Year

- 2010 — Darren Kilby, James River
- 2009 — Mark Smith, Clover Hill
- 2008 — Bradley Johnson, Thomas Dale
- 2007 — Michael Blankenbecler, Thomas Dale
- 2006 — Bob Hoke, Patrick Henry
- 2005 — Brandon Joyner, Thomas Dale
Craig Cruse, Clover Hill

2004 — Chase Grinnell, Clover Hill
2003 — Keith Speers, Clover Hill
2002 — Aaron Smith, Monacan
2001 — Scott Freer, Clover Hill



WILLIAM ATWOOD **Position:** Outsider
hitter **School:** Hanover **Year:** Senior

Skinny: The second-team all region honoree did a little bit of everything for the Capital District tournament champions. Atwood had 210 kills, 87 digs, 41 assists, 35 blocks and 32 aces.

What you didn't know: "I'm a male model. Seriously."



GRAHAM GRESHAM **Position:** Middle blocker **School:**
Cosby **Year:** Senior

Skinny: With Jack Wilson out for a large portion of the season Gresham record 260 kills and 104 blocks to help lead the Titans to the regular-season Dominion District championship.

What you didn't know: "I'm a landscaper."



KIT GUNCHEON **Position:** Libero **School:** Atlee **Year:**
Senior

Skinny: One of the top defensive players in the area, Guncheon recorded 257 digs this season as well as 39 aces for the Capital District regular-season champions and Central Region semifinalists.

What you didn't know: "I can do a handstand for over a minute."



ALEX HALEY **Position:** Setter **School:** Deep Run **Year:** Senior

Skinny: A key cog in the Wildcats unbeaten run through regular season of the Colonial District. Deep Run nearly ended James River's season in the Central Region quarterfinals thanks to Haley's 35 assists and five blocks.

What you didn't know: "I like to take a nap everyday."



SCOTT NYSTROM **Position:** Outsider hitter **School:** Douglas Freeman **Year:** Senior

Skinny: Nystrom was one of the most consistent performers for the Rebels as they advanced to the state tournament for the first time. Nystrom had 213 kills, 146 digs and 69 aces.

What you didn't know: "This summer I interned with the Flying Squirrels and I dressed up as Nutzy."



MITCHELL FORD **Position:** Setter **School:** James River **Year:** Junior

Skinny: The do it all setter recorded 79 assists in the Rapids' two victories in the state tournament. Ford stuffed the other categories on the stat sheet with 106 digs, 72 kills, 65 aces and 52 blocks.

What you didn't know: "I'm 5-10 and I can dunk a basketball."

Second team All-Metro Boys Volleyball

Tyler Peck, Hanover, Sr., middle blocker; Joseph Spriggs, Thomas Dale, Sr., outside hitter; Calvin deVries, Matoaca, Sr., middle blocker; Billy Dishman, Atlee, Sr., setter/outside hitter; Derek Sullivan, Cosby, Sr., outside hitter; Keith Harbula, Midlothian, Sr., outside hitter; Micah Buller, Douglas Freeman, So., libero.