

SPORTS

Close to Home

Gillman will continue volleyball career at SJR State

BY MARK BLUMENTHAL
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Kaedi Gillman wasn't ready to leave home just yet. So she'll be hanging around for the next couple of years.

Gillman signed a letter of intent to play volleyball at St. Johns River State College, staying close to her Interlachen home.

"It didn't take any persuading," the soft-spoken Interlachen High senior said. "I just wanted to continue to play volleyball and have fun."

The first Putnam County volleyball signee at SJR State since Palatka High standout (and now coach) Vicki Newton in 2006, Gillman was deciding between the Vikings and quickly established Santa Fe.

"She didn't have as much contact with Santa Fe as she did with St. Johns and Matt (coach Cohen)," said Tonya Hays, Interlachen's volleyball coach. "And she wanted to play ball again. She's just one of those girls that loves volleyball and wants to play it all the time."

Gillman was offered a chance to play by Cohen and signed her



SJR State photo

Kaedi Gillman, seated right, recently signed with SJR State. Next to her is IHS coach Tonya Hays. Behind them are IHS athletic director Ron Whitehurst, sister Vanessa Gillman, parents Todd and Donna Gillman and IHS principal Thomas Bolling.

letter of intent in a ceremony at SJRSC with fellow signee Haley Bookstore of Clay High. The Vikings had their best season ever under Cohen, finishing 25-9.

But one person was missing the day of the signing: Cohen, who submitted his resignation so he could take a job at Arizona State University. Assistant coach Matt Heffner supervised the signing ceremony.

Though the position has not been filled yet, Gillman said she will stay with the Vikings, saying, "Either way, it's a fresh start.

"It was a little scary at first when he left because for the last few years, he was doing his (volleyball) camps in the summer at our school. I got to know that way. I think I got a text from him before signing saying that he wasn't going to be there. Maybe I should have called him, but we were texting and I was thinking maybe he was not going to be there for me signing. I didn't pick up on the fact he was leaving the school until later on."

See **GILLMAN**, Page 9A

Gillman

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8A

This fall, Gillman helped lead the Rams to a 19-6 record, the most wins the program collected for a season since 2007. The Rams earned their first state tournament berth since that season.

Gillman delivered 277 kills, the

most of any player in Putnam County, had 61 blocks, 293 digs, 26 assists and put up 176 service points, 80 for aces. It earned her *Daily News* Prep Volleyball Player of the Year honors, the first Rams player to win since Lindsey Kurtz in 2008.

"I actually see her being one of the young guns that comes in and makes the older girls work," Hays said of what she sees for her protégé next year. "She's going to be fighting hard for a spot. She feels privileged to be part of a college program, but not content sitting on the bench. She's going to be humbled because she's playing with players at the same level or better now, so I think she's going to go in there and make those girls work hard to keep their spots."

"I tend to expect more out of myself than others do," said

Gillman, who also finished her first and only season as IHS' girls soccer team goalkeeper, called in to do the job in a pinch by Rams coach Jacqueline Larsen. "I'm just working out now and in March, I'll be involved in a beach volleyball tournament. I like the beach volleyball more because your hands are always on the ball."

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