

## Special Delivery



Kirby Mason delivers for Interlachen against Palatka last season.

Daily News file photo

# Ram Turns Viking

Two-time Putnam Player of the Year Mason finds comfort zone at St. Johns

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**K**irby Mason heard from a number of colleges who wanted her volleyball prowess. The offers seemed nice, but only one school came to the forefront once she started dual-enrollment there already.

And so the Interlachen High School star made the decision to stay close to home and continue an amazing volleyball career at St. Johns River State College for coach Matt Cohen starting next season.

“We’ve done private lessons during my club season in 2018 or ‘19,” she said. “I think I’ve only been to one of his camps. After that camp, I didn’t go to any more of his camps, but we have done private lessons when I was in club ball. He worked on my right-side hit because I was struggling like that.

“It wasn’t like I knew from the very get-go,” Mason

added. “I’ve always kept my options open, and I had this philosophy that I’m not too much of a player. But I take it as it goes, which was really a blessing I guess. I always thought to myself that I had to think higher and to press myself. So I didn’t want to get comfortable to where I always had St. Johns. But then I started dual-enrolling there and having Matt as a coach and knowing him and watching the games, it just felt right.”

Mason is easily the most decorated player in Interlachen High history, earning *Daily News* All-County honors four straight years for coach Tonya Troiano, and winning Player of the Year honors her junior and senior seasons. Mason can do a little of everything. She’s mainly an outside hitter, but she can also play middle hitter and, in a pinch, can be used as a setter and a defensive player. In earning her second straight player of the year honor, Mason dominated with 128 kills, 62 aces, 19 blocks and 150 digs for the

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## Mason

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12-8 Rams.

“I’m setting as a pin hitters,” said Mason of the outside hitter spot. “I’ve basically played every position with the exception of setter and libero, but I’ve done a little bit of each. So there isn’t a position I haven’t played.”

“I think she’ll do very well wherever she’s put,” Troiano said. “She’s been an eager athlete, willing to learn, willing to try things. She’ll stand out as a freshman player there. It’s going to be beneficial to her. Plus, she is very family-oriented, and a lot of her coaches and friends will come to watch her. That benefits any athlete going to the next level.”

Mason, who will study general education at SJR State, will be joining a team that is loaded with talent that finished the 2019 season at 22-9 and reached the Juco Sun-Lakes Division II championship game, losing in the final to Gulf Coast State.

“I don’t feel I’m the key to unlocking everything,” Mason modestly answered. “But I know some of the



From left: Interlachen coach Tonya Troiano, SJR State coach Matt Cohen, Kirby Mason, parents Ashley and Creston Mason.

players, including one player I’ve played with (in club ball) in Mone Gordon (of Middleburg). But I think last year showed how far they can get, and that they can achieve any goal they want. With a good group of girls like myself and others that have been signed, we can get right back there in time.”

This will be the second player that

Troiano is sending on to SJR State. Another former *Daily News* player of the year, 2015 recipient Kaedi Gillman, signed to play for the Vikings and Cohen, but Cohen took off for Arizona for the next two seasons. Gillman was able to sign to play volleyball at Ave Maria College in southwestern Florida.

“I think Matt is a wonderful coach

and I think he’s going to enjoy having Kirby,” Troiano said. “I’m not apprehensive at all of any kind of coaching change. (Cohen) was going to stay, he didn’t plan on any changes.”

Mason admitted she is a little rusty since after the season, she decided to take time off and enjoy her senior year. But now with the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic taking hold, Mason is wondering what she’ll have left of her senior year.

“I really wanted to enjoy my senior year because college sports is a full-time job,” said Mason, who attends Q.I. Roberts Junior-Senior High School. “Now as I say I wanted to enjoy my senior year, my senior year has been halted by this virus that’s going around. I haven’t gotten back to the gym. I’ve been trying to do stuff. I was going to play beach volleyball, but don’t know how that’s going to play out now. I’m definitely trying to do as much as I can considering what is going on today. But I won’t lie – I’m definitely rusty. Once I’m back in focus on volleyball, it won’t take time to get back in the groove. It was a much-needed break to just go and enjoy before college.”