Al Pacino said of acting: “There’s a question of understanding it as an audience and understanding it as an artist.”

Jessie says: This does parallel volleyball. There is often a stark contrast in the experience as an audience and that of a player or an artist.

Volleyball is a game of mistakes — making it a mentally-challenging game. Many observers fail to recognize the mental and psychological challenges that come with the sport. Players constantly battle with these challenges and thus when the best or worst of performances occur it is felt most powerfully by the players rather than the observer.

Jessie Niles report

Home: Turner Valley, AB
High school: Oilfields, Grade 9-10
Strathcona-Tweedsmuir, Grade 11-12
Graduated 2011
High school setter, power hitter
2010 MJFL Strathcona-Tweedsmuir
Spartans provincial high school champions
Club volleyball: Calgary Junior Dinos
Canadian national B team: 2013, 14
Canada’s Universities Games team: 2015
University faculty: Biological sciences
Year of university eligibility: 5th
Position with Pandas: Libero
Pandas: Team’s career leader digs
Academic All-Canadian 2012-13, 13-14, 14-15
2011-12 CIS nationals, Alberta 2nd
2012-13 CIS nationals, Alberta 2nd
2014-15 CIS nationals, Alberta 2nd

“A scouting report about me:

- An extremely skilled defensive player who will do anything to keep the ball off the floor.
- A key team player with strong passing and setting skills.
- Often the loudest person on and off the court.
- Brings a contagious energy and passion for the game.

Take five with Jessie Niles

My former teammate Josi Dorfler from Germany had a big influence on me. She was a great leader on the court and had a very calming influence.

“The Pandas are consistently among the top because of the coaches we have and because of the athletes that are recruited.

“The history of excellence and achievement that Laurie has built throughout the program history makes the program very attractive to the best athletes in Canada and internationally.

“Along with bringing in the best athletes, Laurie works with a very talented and hardworking coaching staff. The coaching staff is very knowledgeable about all areas of the game, especially technically and tactically.

“The hard work that both the coaches and the athletes dedicate to the program makes the Pandas a top-level team year after year.

“The pursuit to be the best using whatever it takes is a mindset shared by everyone involved in the program.”
Making her mark

St. Albert Catholic Skyhawks, coached by Panda alumnus Jocelyn Blair, won the girls 3A title in the recent Alberta Schools' Athletic Association provincial volleyball championships.


Blair is a graduate of Bellerose Composite High School in St. Albert. She was a power hitter with the Pandas from 2004-09, was named a CIS All-Canadian player three times and earned Academic All-Canadian honours all five years. She has been an assistant coach with the Pandas and Grant MacEwan Griffins.

Blair has a BA in education and a Masters in coaching sciences.

Finishing touch

Twelve of the 41 sets Alberta played in the first half of the conference schedule this season were decided by two points. The Pandas were 10-2 in those sets.

Shauntelle Hogg delivers a game-ending kill against Thompson Rivers.

Gbemisola Olutogun handcuffs Saskatchewan with a serve.

Meg Casault aces Brandon.

The Pandas get it done.

Alberta (12-0) resumes the Canada West conference season Jan. 8 in Langley, B.C. against the defending national champion Trinity Western Spartans.

Check out the Pandas

Mariah Walsh .......... 1st Canada West, assists
Meg Casault .......... 3rd Canada West, kills
Shauntelle Hogg ...... 3rd Canada West, solo blocks
Jessie Niles .......... 3rd Canada West, digs

Holiday plans

The Pandas welcome a team from the National Institute of Fitness and Sports in Kanoya, Japan to Edmonton, Dec. 30 to Jan. 7.

This is part of the continuing athletics and culture exchange that the Pandas program has with Japan.

Joining the Pandas and Kanoya in the New Year’s Classic tournament Saturday, Jan. 2 and Sunday, Jan. 3 at the Saville Centre on campus are the University of Calgary Dinos, Université de Montréal Carabins, University of Regina Cougars and University of Saskatchewan Huskies.

—Photo by Robert Antoniuk