

Phillips cleared for state volleyball

Written by Jim Ecker

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Marion High School senior Abby Phillips has permission to take the splint off her right hand now, so that will make it a lot easier for her to sign her national letter-of-intent with the Iowa State Cyclones on Wednesday.

Of more immediate importance, it also means she has been cleared to play in the Class 4A state volleyball tournament that begins Tuesday with an opening-round match against Charles City at 4 p.m. at the U.S. Cellular Center.

Her doctor gave her permission to play following a medical exam Monday afternoon, even though the broken bone near the base of the ring finger on her right hand is not 100 percent. It's strong enough, however, so Phillips will slide the splint off her hand Tuesday afternoon and take the court with soft-foam padding to protect the injury.

"It's not completely healed," Phillips said Monday night after a team dinner. "It's like 60 percent healed, but it's pretty good."

"The doctor said it's gotten a lot better, so I heal pretty fast. And he said I'm cleared to play."

Phillips practiced with the Indians Monday afternoon without trouble. She has dexterity in her right hand and feels ready to play.

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"It was great to be with my teammates," she said. "We really feed off each other and I just love being with them."

Phillips hurt her hand in practice on Friday, Oct. 10, but she played in all five matches at the Jefferson Westside Invitational the next day without knowing the extent of the injury. She played again Oct. 14 against Williamsburg, but then the broken bone was diagnosed and she has not played since, missing eight straight matches and the entire regional tournament.

She feared her high school volleyball career was over, but Marion defeated DeWitt Central in the regional finals last Thursday and gave Phillips enough time to make it back for the state tournament.

"I was a little afraid," she said about a premature end to her prep career. "But what really helped me was my faith in God. I prayed a lot.

"I wanted to be there for my team, no matter what position I was in, whether it was on the bench cheering or on the court."

Phillips supported her teammates as best she could the past few weeks, but definitely missed playing.

"It was a lot harder than I thought. It really was," she said. "It was very tough for me, but I really have so much support that I felt at peace. I felt that no matter what, it was going to be OK."

Phillips returned to Marion High School after her doctor's appointment Monday and told Coach Roxanne Paulsen she'd been cleared to play. "She was really happy," said Phillips.

Phillips told some of her teammates the good news and suited up for practice. She said practice went well, despite the long layoff.

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"The muscle memory kicks in again and I've been playing for a long time," she said. "I really don't see a problem too much."

The third-ranked Indians (33-7) developed additional depth and confidence while Phillips was sidelined. Now they're ready to face sixth-ranked Charles City (41-4) in the state tournament.

"I think it will be really exciting," said Phillips. "This is the first time our team has gone to state in awhile. It's going to be a huge experience for the underclassmen and the upperclassmen. I think we're really excited to be part of something big.

"I feel like so many of our players have really improved. They had to step up their game," she said. "I think we're an all-around better team because of this."

This is Marion's sixth trip to the state tournament in school history. The Indians won the Class 3A title in 2008 and are making their first appearance in the state meet since 2009.

The Class 4A semifinals are scheduled for Thursday and the finals are Friday.