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## DYNAMIC DUO

By **LEE DIEKEMPER** Tribune correspondent

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LARGO - One is a former Pasco-Hernando Community College volleyball legend. The other is a current PHCC volleyball fixture hoping she, too, will carve out her own legend at the school.

Both are coaches.

Both have found a unique way to keep their players' attentions. In short, they practice what they preach. And both lead their players by example on the court, albeit a bit of a different court.

Current PHCC coach Kim Whitney and former PHCC Junior College All-American and current Palm Harbor University High School coach Tara Burton-Kuk have teamed to form quite a formidable duo on the AVP beach volleyball tour. This weekend, they will compete in the AVP Esurance Tampa Open at the St. Pete Times Forum.

If Whitney and Burton-Kuk have any type of success as they have recently on the tour, the women will be playing Sunday with hopes of improving on their best finish to date last weekend when they finished ninth in an AVP Tour stop in Louisville, Ky.

The duo have won roughly \$2,000 each on the tour in just a handful of matches. And the pairing between Whitney and Burton-Kuk almost came by accident.

"We just played against each other in Florida beach tournaments all the time," Burton-Kuk remembered of Whitney. "Last year she asked me to play in an event as the person whom she had played with was out of the country and my partner couldn't play.

"We clicked right away. We finished 17th and we thought, 'Oh, maybe we should try this on a regular basis?'"

Though she knew Burton-Kuk only from their beach volleyball experience, Whitney never knew they shared a common bond until they teamed up.

"She asked me where I coached and I told her PHCC and she said, 'No way!'" Whitney laughed. "It's pretty awesome."

"She even found one of my awards the other day at school," Burton-Kuk said.

It's really no wonder the two have become successful as a team. Whitney, after playing at Kansas State, played professional indoor volleyball for four years. Burton-Kuk this year is ranked as the No. 2 individual beach volleyball player by avpnex.com.

Last year, Burton-Kuk was so successful on the beach volleyball tour, she weighed her options for weeks, seriously considering quitting both her teaching and coaching positions at Palm Harbor to train full time for the tour. She said even Whitney toyed with the idea of joining her on the professional tour.

But in the end, responsibility won out over chasing a dream.

"It's not in the cards," Burton-Kuk said. "We both really love our jobs and are happy just traveling on weekends as much as we can and training as much as we can.

"For us, the allure is the competition. Every team is good. So every match we have to play our best. We don't always get that on weekends down here [at Clearwater Beach tournaments]."

Both women suggested that since they live so close together - Whitney in Dunedin and Burton-Kuk in Clearwater - they are able to train together, often several times a week. This leads to success on the sand courts.

With previous partners, they lived hundreds of miles apart and never got to see them until just before a weekend tournament began.

Both women use their newfound friendship to their professional advantage as well.

Burton-Kuk has turned what was a moribund volleyball program at Palm Harbor into one of Pinellas County's best, being ranked with or higher than strong programs like Clearwater or East Lake. Whitney is hoping their friendship can help lure a talented player or two to the New Port Richey campus.

The two coaches have formed a "Big Sister/Little Sister" program in which the PHCC players will come out to watch and support a Palm Harbor match. In turn, the Palm Harbor girls will go to PHCC games.

"They came to watch our match with East Lake and we went up to watch their match with [Hillsborough Community College],"

Burton-Kuk said.

"We even did a beach volleyball tournament together," Whitney said.

"It was great for the girls to go up there and see how it is to succeed at the next level," Burton-Kuk said.

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