

Being named the Glenbard North girls volleyball team's new varsity head coach is just part of Anne Mastandrea's whirlwind fall.

Mastandrea also is beginning her first full-time teaching job at the school as a special education teacher after earning her master's degree from Lewis University in May.

On Oct. 8, the Panthers will visit Glenbard West, where Mastandrea previously was a volunteer assistant coach for Pete Mastandrea, her father. That comes four days after yet another big event – Mastandrea's wedding with Nat Bremner.

"My athletic director (Matt Bowser) gets a kick out of it because I just tell him, 'Oh (the wedding is) just an interruption in the volleyball season, just a short interruption,'" Mastandrea said.

"I'm excited to get into the season and all. I like doing the management stuff, but I love coaching and coaching comes second nature to me. I've been in the volleyball gym since I was like in fifth grade and I've been coaching for a number of years so when I get into practice, that's when I feel comfortable. When I get into the gym, that's like my comfort zone."

Mastandrea hopes to bring a new energy and commitment to a Glenbard North program with five returning varsity letterwinners and a mix of six seniors, five juniors and one sophomore. Senior Nicole Tobison is a fourth-year varsity player while seniors Sarah Peters and Sarah Petzold and juniors Stephanie Cole and Emily Krohn also return.

The Panthers open the season at home Sept. 3 against Willowbrook before visiting Willowbrook for its two-day invitational Sept. 5-6. They compete in the perennially tough DuPage Valley Conference, which they have not won since 1979. Their last regional title was in 1983.

"I think we'll set our own individual team goals and if we meet those goals, that will be a really successful season to me," Mastandrea said. "I want to look at the big picture, but giving the girls a positive experience and not putting all of the pressure on them. It is important to me that we do this together as a team and we set those individual team goals and if we're playing our best volleyball as

much as we can, that would be a successful season for me."

Mastandrea already had set her wedding date when she learned about the coaching vacancy. She was hired in the spring and met with the players before the end of the school year. The Panthers began bonding during summer camp at the school on Wednesday nights and by playing summer league volleyball on Thursdays.

The players had not previously crossed paths with the 5-foot-5 Mastandrea, who was a starting defensive specialist for Downers Grove South's last state championship team in 2002 in Class AA. She went on to star at Purdue University (West Lafayette, Ind.) and was part of four NCAA Tournament teams with the 2005 and 2006 Boilermakers both winning two matches to reach the Sweet 16 regional semifinals.

Besides coaching at Glenbard West, she also previously coached on the collegiate and club levels but had gone on a "volleyball hiatus" while working on her master's degree.

Because of her class schedule for that degree last volleyball season, she could not attend when Glenbard North lost to Glenbard West 25-14, 25-14 in the Class 4A West Chicago Regional semifinals.

"The girls have been really positive and upbeat and they seem like a very hard-working group of kids with high expectations to succeed and win, which is really exciting," Mastandrea said. "I think now they they've learned more about me. Now my plan is to focus on this varsity program and work year round to get it built from the ground up. I'm here for the long haul. I'm young now so I have plans to have a family one day, but I think you can do it all. That's my plan, knock on wood."

As a player, Mastandrea joined Downers South's varsity as a freshman for the state tournament and was a full-time starter the next three years. She went downstate three times with the Mustangs, who also took third in 2000. As a senior, she earned All-West Suburban Conference Gold Division honors, but the Mustangs lost in the super-sectional to Naperville North.

"I really remember that game still to this day," Mastandrea said.

Mastandrea joined Purdue as a walk-on and was among 20 players, but she caught a break. Her freshman year was the first time that the libero position had been added to NCAA volleyball before being added by the IHSA in 2005.

Mastandrea not only made the Boilermakers but started all four years and earned a scholarship by her sophomore year.

Mastandrea was a senior captain and still ranks fourth in the program for career digs (1,356) and fifth in digs per game (3.33). Her 4.76 digs-per-game average from 2005 still is the highest program history and her 571 digs that season is the second-highest single-season total. She also earned numerous all-tournament and Big Ten Conference Defensive Player of the Week honors along the way.

Her most coveted award came as senior when she was one of the recipients of the Ben Korschot Perseverance Award. The annual award, named for a former football walk-on, is given to Purdue athletes who began their careers as walk-ons but went on to earn scholarships and make impacts on their respective teams.

"It's kind of geared toward a walk-on athlete, someone that wasn't one of those name players but made a difference on their team," Mastandrea said. "I remember going in freshman year thinking, 'Wow, that's a cool award. I want to work to get that.' "

Graduating with a degree in health promotion, Mastandrea began her collegiate coaching experience with two years at Northwestern University as its director of volleyball operations. Although Mastandrea could not directly coach players under NCAA rules, she was involved in practice planning and scouting. One season involved a 10-day trip to Italy during spring practice to play its national team and pro teams.

Mastandrea also was a club coach from 2006-10 for 1st Alliance. In 2009, the 17-and-under Silver team that she coached finished second in the open (top) division at the Junior Volleyball Directors Association National Championships in Louisville, Ky. Her 17 Black team won the 2010 club division title at the Amateur Athletic Union National Championships in Orlando, Fla.

In 2010, Mastandrea left the area for one season as an assistant coach for the West Carolina University women's volleyball team.

"I aspired to be a collegiate head coach and then kind of after doing that for several years I realized that I missed Chicago. I wanted to kind of come back closer to home," Mastandrea said. "I knew I wanted to be a head coach. You have to get your ducks in a row so I needed to go back to school and I needed to get a job and I knew eventually it would come together."

As Mastandrea returned to work on her master's degree, she began coaching with her father at Glenbard West. The Hilltoppers have won West Suburban Conference Silver and regional titles the past two seasons and reached the 2013 super-sectional. They previously hadn't won a conference title since 1984 or a regional since 1985.

With her libero background, Mastandrea mostly worked with the team's defensive aspects.

"Coaching together with my dad was an experience I could never replace. That was so much fun and it ended too shortly because we were just kind of getting a good feel and flow," Mastandrea said. "We could have coached together forever but I was excited to take a head coaching position because I always wanted to coach volleyball and that was kind of a passion of mine."

The two sometimes discussed their roles and contributions to the program. Pete was the motivator and set the tone for the program. Anne was more the technician and could offer a different perspective as a former collegiate player with exposure to higher-level play.

"He can get a group of kids moving faster than anyone else I've ever seen," Mastandrea said. "He is like my coaching idol because he's a great teacher, he's a great person. He cares so much about his players and his kids. He wants to be there for his kids, however he can, and support them and see them grow as individuals and as a team. I take a lot from him because he coaches for the right reasons and he does a great job with the kids, and he knows a lot about volleyball."

"I respect (their coaches) a lot and wish them the best of luck. I thank them for everything they've given me because they do a great job, both my dad and Christine (Mayer) with the boys in developing players and developing a family program. I learned a lot from them and I thank them for that."

With her emphasis on defense, Mastandrea is hopeful the Panthers can enjoy success initially through plain tenacity and hard work. When she talked with her new players about the 2013 season, Mastandrea said that several girls said they were in several matches but often were unable to pull them out.

"I'm an underdog athlete and obviously I was a libero in college so I bring that defensive mentality with me wherever I go. That's something I try to instill on my kids, just hard work, kind of an underdog mentality," Mastandrea said. "We've got to run through the wall to get to the next level so I'm going to have to push the kids to their limits but I think that when you're in that kind of environment where you're working hard and see the progress, you're willing to put forth that work."

The Panthers certainly will be underdogs when they visit Glenbard West, a top-10 area-rated team in the preseason. Mastandrea is hoping her team will be excited for the challenge, regardless of the father-daughter coaching storyline.

"It'll be fun to go back to Glenbard West but I'm cautious not to make it too big of a deal. It's still just another game," Mastandrea said. "For me, it's got some background and I'm sure my girls will kind of share in that, but for them it's another match and we're excited to go play a really great Glenbard West team. By that time, we'll have a month of training so hopefully my expectation is that we give them a game.

"We don't want it to be a Mastandrea versus Mastandrea competition. But then technically I'll be a Bremner because I'll be married."

-- by Bill Stone