

# Spanaway Lake volleyball tearing through 3A PCL, built for long-term success

[By Doug Drowley](#) October 13, 2022 7:30 AM

Spanaway Lake players celebrate after scoring a point in the first game of a 3A PCL match against Lincoln on Tuesday, Oct. 11, 2022, at Spanaway Lake High School in Spanaway, Wash. Pete Caster *Pete Caster / The News Tribune*

When she first heard where she'd been placed as a student teacher three years ago, Melanie Aquino had a quick reaction.

"Where the heck is that?" Aquino said.

This story is a subscriber exclusive

A native of Renton, and at the time the head volleyball coach at her alma mater Hazen High School even as she was completing her master's degree in education, Aquino didn't know where Parkland and Spanaway Lake were located.

With the COVID-19 pandemic still raging, she didn't initially care. It didn't matter since classes still were being conducted remotely for both students and teachers.

"I figured it would all be on Zoom, anyway," Aquino said. "But eventually I had to start commuting down here."

Fast-forward two years, and Aquino is in her second full year in the classroom as a teacher. She's also shepherding a young group of Sentinels

as the second-year volleyball coach, and Spanaway Lake is enjoying big success early in the 2022 campaign.

That success has begun to put the Sentinels volleyball program back on the map, at least in the Class 3A Pierce County League landscape.

Spanaway Lake is 7-1 overall and 6-0 in the 3A PCL after sweeping Lincoln in three sets on Tuesday night at home. The Sentinels only loss came to 4A SPSL program Rogers more than a month ago, in the team's first match of the season.

### **Photos: Spanaway Lake Sweeps Lincoln in PCL tilt**

Spanaway Lake's Lema Fuamatu (7) hits a ball past Lincoln's Peanut Kamuta (14) and Lolo Fifita (8) during the third game of a 3A PCL match on Tuesday, Oct. 11, 2022, at Spanaway Lake High School in Spanaway, Wash. Pete Caster  
*Pete Caster / The News Tribune*

Spanaway Lake has accomplished all of this with a youth movement that should set the program up for long-range success.

"It's pretty remarkable," Aquino said. "We only have one senior."

Led by a pair of juniors in outside hitter Lemasino Fuamato and middle hitter Reminess Rose Kaleopa-Grey, the larger core of the Sentinels lies in its sophomore class. And two of those three sophomores that contribute mightily have returned to the lineup after being sidelined for different reasons last fall as freshmen.

Off to a similar start as this fall at 5-1, Spanaway Lake was on the verge of going to 6-1 against Lakes when hitter Sesilia Felagai suffered an injury that sent her to the sidelines for the remainder of the 2021 campaign. Spanaway Lake faltered after the injury, losing to the Lancers and struggling the rest of the way to finish 8-5 overall and falling in the first round of the district tournament.

"I tore my ACL last September," Felagai said. "After that, I just stayed home

and did physical therapy. I kept working on making my leg strong."

Felagai worked hard enough to get back into playing shape heading into this fall, though she admits she's still not at 100 percent. Recognizing that, Aquino changed Felagai's role at least for this season.

"We have to keep her to light jumping," Aquino said. "So she's back at libero. And she's really helping us."

Still able to attack from the back row, Felagai nonetheless knows there are bigger things on the future. And a return to the outside front row offensively will happen.

"I'll be hitting outside next year," Felagai said.

The libero's return has been accompanied by the comeback of another sophomore, setter Tanumaleu Fuamato, who left the team after only a couple of weeks in 2021 to focus on her schoolwork.

"After losing those two, we lost some games," Aquino said. "We had a lot of reconstruction to do. They were both so strong offensively and defensively."

Fuamato found her focus, and a year later says she has learned to balance school and volleyball. Her teammates knew she was returning, of course. Many of them have played together in local club programs in addition to school ball.

"It was hard," Fuamato said of the transition to high school. "When I played club volleyball, all you do is play. With school, you have to do it in class, too. But I've been doing good."

Tanumaleu is the sister of Lemasino. Meanwhile, Kaleopa-Grey has anchored the center of the court.

"She's just also got her stuff together," Aquino said of her junior middle

blocker. "She's improved so much this year, and volleyball is not even her main sport."

Kaleopa-Grey is a wrestler. But the focus for all is squarely on volleyball this fall.

"There's just something different this year," Aquino said. "We're excited. And we're determined to go to state this year."

A trip to the state tournament would be Spanaway Lake's first since 2013, when the Sentinels made it to the 4A event. Spanaway Lake last placed at state in 2006, when it finished sixth, going 2-2 after advancing to the semifinals.

"I feel it as a team," Tanumaleu Fuamoto said. "We want to take it to state, playing just one game at a time."