

SCHOLASTIC PROFILE

Soaring Again (Vertically)

Swift left luge to focus on volleyball

BY JIM SCHILTZ
Gazette Sportswriter

ROTTERDAM
Can you imagine soaring down a sheet of ice, feet-first, on a small sled while negotiating turns at 80 miles per hour?

Hilary Swift doesn't have to imagine. She's been there. "It's hard to explain the feeling. It's surreal," said the Schalmont High School senior, who experienced such wild rides as a member of the USA Luge's Junior Olympic Development Team. "You don't realize how fast you're going until you crash."

Swift is crashing opposing teams' hopes instead of sleds these days as one of the premier volleyball players in the Colonial Council. Her kills and blocks have steadily piled up, and have been instrumental in Schalmont's unbeaten run to the league's Liberty Division championship, and 16-1 overall record.

"It was a tough decision, but last January, I officially retired from luge," said the 17-year-old Swift. "I had a great experience and gained so much from it, but I wanted to shift my focus more toward volleyball."

With added attention to her game, Swift has blossomed, and is a candidate not only for the Colonial Council most valuable player award, but all-state honors, as well.

"You can be a very casual volleyball fan, and she'd catch your eye," Schalmont coach Kevin Meachem said of his 5-foot-8 middle hitter. "She's got the whole package. She does it all for us."

It is Swift's ability to leap high, though, that first draws your

attention. There are no hidden springs in her sneakers, though. It only appears so.

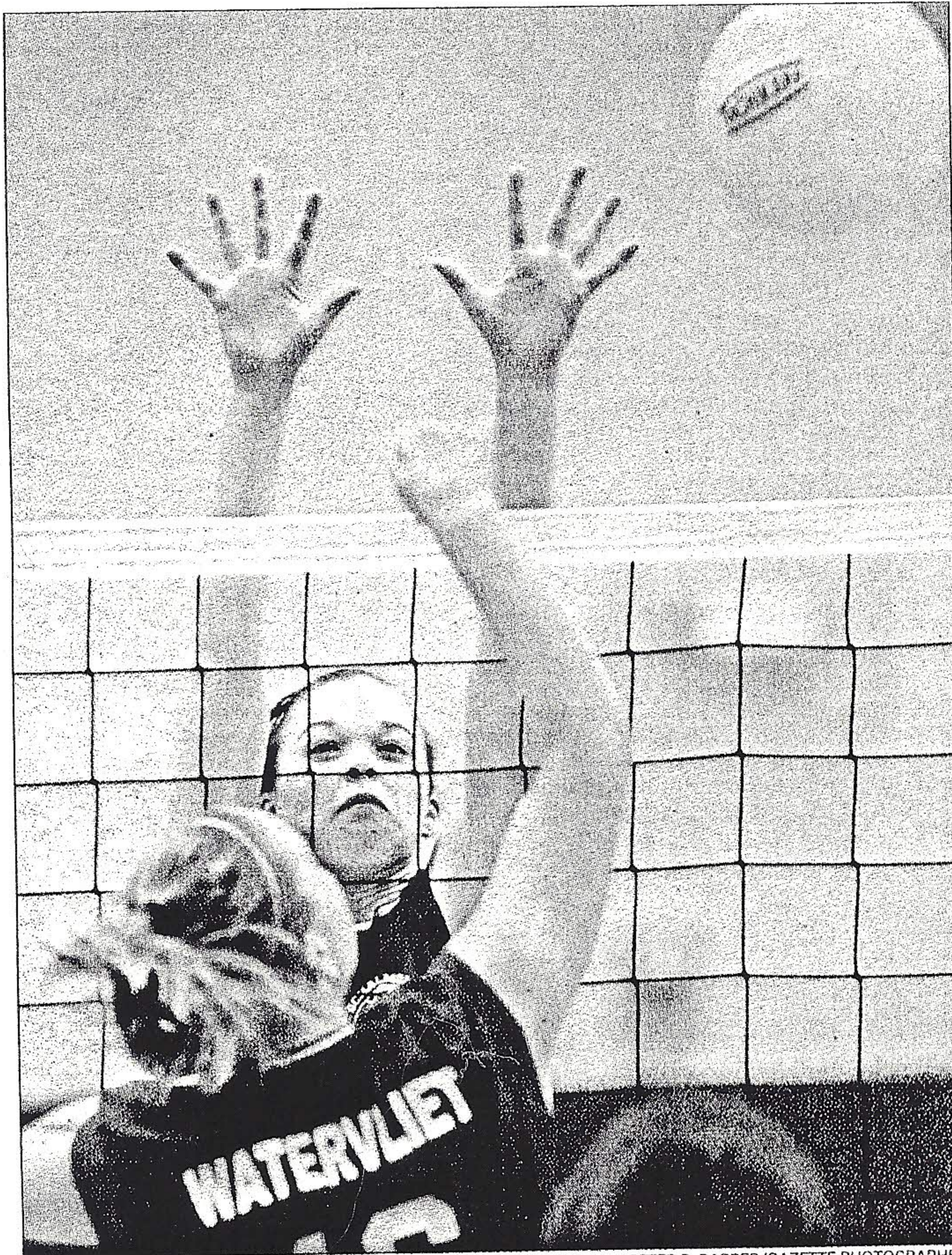
"She's a weapon from anywhere on the court because she can jump so high. She can score points from the back, and she's a terrific blocker," Meachem said of the school's career leader in that category. "If we get several blocks early in a match, they'll try to hit it around her or over her, and that makes it easier for our defense. She makes the whole team better."

Regardless of her pursuit, be it academic or athletic, getting better is always a primary goal for the smart and energetic Swift.

"This past spring, I began to do plyometrics because I wanted to jump higher," Swift said of an exercises program designed to increase muscle explosion. "I go to the gym three days a week for an hour and a half, and I've improved five inches on my vertical [jump]."

"She's a worker. With the Olympic luge program, she'd be in the weight room for hours, and she still goes at it hard," Meachem said. "There's maybe 1 percent body fat on her. She's in phenomenal shape."

And she certainly has the game to go along with her well-toned physique. She showed enough this past summer to get an invite to the prestigious Ireva High Performance camp at Clarkson University, and made a camp all-star team that went on to compete in a Florida tournament, matching the nation's best players.



PETER R. BARBER/GAZETTE PHOTOGRAPHER
Schalmont's Hilary Swift, facing camera, blocks a shot by Watervliet's Laci Szczepanski Thursday in their Colonial Council volleyball match. Swift's leaping ability has made her an effective weapon for the 16-1 Sabres.

"When I was younger, I was a back row player," said Swift, a longtime member of Northeast Thunder Volleyball Club. "I got good at that at an early age, and the rest developed as I got older."

"She's slender, but she stings the ball. When she hits it, the other team notices," Meachem said. "She's also a terrific passer, and she has two different serves now. She has a real powerful spin serve and a floating serve that's very effective. At the beginning of last year, I'd sub her out sometimes for the serve, but this year, she's on the court all the time."

That wasn't the case during Swift's sophomore year, when she missed 83 days of study and play at Schalmont while part of the development luge team based in Lake Placid.

Swift's sledding venture began

in earnest at a USA Luge Slider Search Tour event in Albany — "there were two other kids there" — and afterward, in the summer of 2004, she made it through two screening camps before her team selection.

"It was a great experience," said Swift. "I got a lot stronger, but work ethic was the big one. We trained all year-round."

Swift believes her tour with the luge team will serve her well in college. The honors student with a career 94 classroom average has her eye on New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Cal Poly, and dreams of a career in the exercise science field.

"I heard it was very similar to going to college, with the routine, doing laundry and things like that and taking care of school work," Swift said. "By doing it already, I'll be prepared for what's ahead."

The Hilary Swift file



SCHOOL: Schalmont

GRADE: Senior

AGE: 17

NICKNAME: Hils

FAMILY: Parents Lauren and Bryan. Brother Greg

(21).

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Colonial Council first-team all-star as junior. Holds Schalmont record for career blocks. Named most valuable player at this

year's Fonda-Fultonville and Schalmont tournaments. Science and English Honor Society. Former member of USA Luge's Junior Olympic Development Team. Career classroom average of 94.

OTHER SPORT: Track and field

CAREER AMBITION: Exercise science

FAVORITE CLASS: Science

FAVORITE TV SHOW: Family Guy

FAVORITE FOOD: Stir fry

FAVORITE BOOK: Time Traveler's Wife

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What's just...
for Swift and her teammates is the Section II volleyball tournament. The Sabres placed second among the Class B schools last year, losing to league rival Ravena-Coeymans-Selkirk in a four-game title match.

Swift turned in a strong performance in a recent rematch with Ravena-Coeymans-Selkirk, totaling 14 kills and 10 blocks in a four-game victory for the Sabres. Swift also had 14 kills and eight blocks against one of the Colonial Council's other top teams, Voorheesville, in a three-game sweep.

"We're definitely shooting for the sectional finals, and coach thinks we can make the states," said Swift, who, along with senior captains Claire Fisher, Stacy Scheffer and Megan Lesperance, has led the Sabres' surge. "We've got some big goals, but the only way to approach it is to take one step at a time."

Those steps began long before Swift and the rest of the Sabres played their first match.

"Hilary got the rest of them into an offseason conditioning program, and in August, she got them to come in a half hour early to run a mile before practice," Meachem said. "I wouldn't have dared to ask them to do that before a four-hour practice, but they followed along. That's the kind of leader she is."

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