

PROFILE

# Villeneuve ends volleyball career on high note

BY CARMEN TAM

After helping his team win CIAU volleyball bronze in 1994 and 1995, Eric Villeneuve came back to Dalhousie this year for a last chance at the illustrious gold medal after taking a year off to travel in Europe and to spend time with his family back in Gloucester, Ontario.

Villeneuve knew his heart was in Dalhousie, and Halifax was where he wanted to be after visits in January and March of last year. With his parent's encouragement, Villeneuve enrolled in Health Education at Dal to upgrade his resume after earning a B.A. in History and French in 1995.

Now, after five AUSA titles and five trips to Nationals that proved fruitful, Villeneuve and the Tigers recently capped off another great season for Dalhousie. 1997

marked the Tigers' first-ever appearance in a national final and Dalhousie's best-ever finish with a silver medal. The Dal captain was recognized as a second team All-Canadian as well as a tournament All-Star at the national championships.

Villeneuve led the Tigers to an undefeated (10-0) record in AUSA league action. The rightside hitter took numerous Player of the Game honours for many of his solid performances in league competition. By dominating the hardwood, Villeneuve was named AUSA Playoff MVP and collected another AUSA all-star credit.

In tournaments this season the Tigers captured a first place finish in Waterloo along with silvers at Sherbrooke and at the Digs Classic. Villeneuve's stellar performances were recognized and

he was named to the tournament all-star team at every outing.

Villeneuve is quick to note the team's success was due to a complete team endeavour. "The team chemistry has been incredible this year, everyone knew in the beginning of the year that we could do it, everyone made a commitment and worked very hard," he says.

The 24-year-old cites his high school coach Kerry MacLean as an important motivating factor early in his career, while Dalhousie head coach Al Scott is "an exceptional technical coach" and an important force for his "personnel development."

"Eric is one of the best team leaders in all my time here at Dal," says Scott. "He did an exceptional job bringing the team together. Personally, Eric had his best year ever; he was extremely consistent and played the total game."

Former Dalhousie assistant coach Dan Ota, who coached Eric in 1994 and 1995 — and is now sharing coaching duties at the University of Calgary — notes, "Eric is a player who brings a real competitive fire onto the court. He comes to the gym with the attitude that he's not going to let the guy on the other side of the net beat him."

Ota continues, "When Dal beat us (Calgary) in the semi-finals of Nationals, he was an absolute rock out there. We couldn't crack him, no matter what we did. I could just see by the look in his eye that he wasn't going to let his team lose on that night."

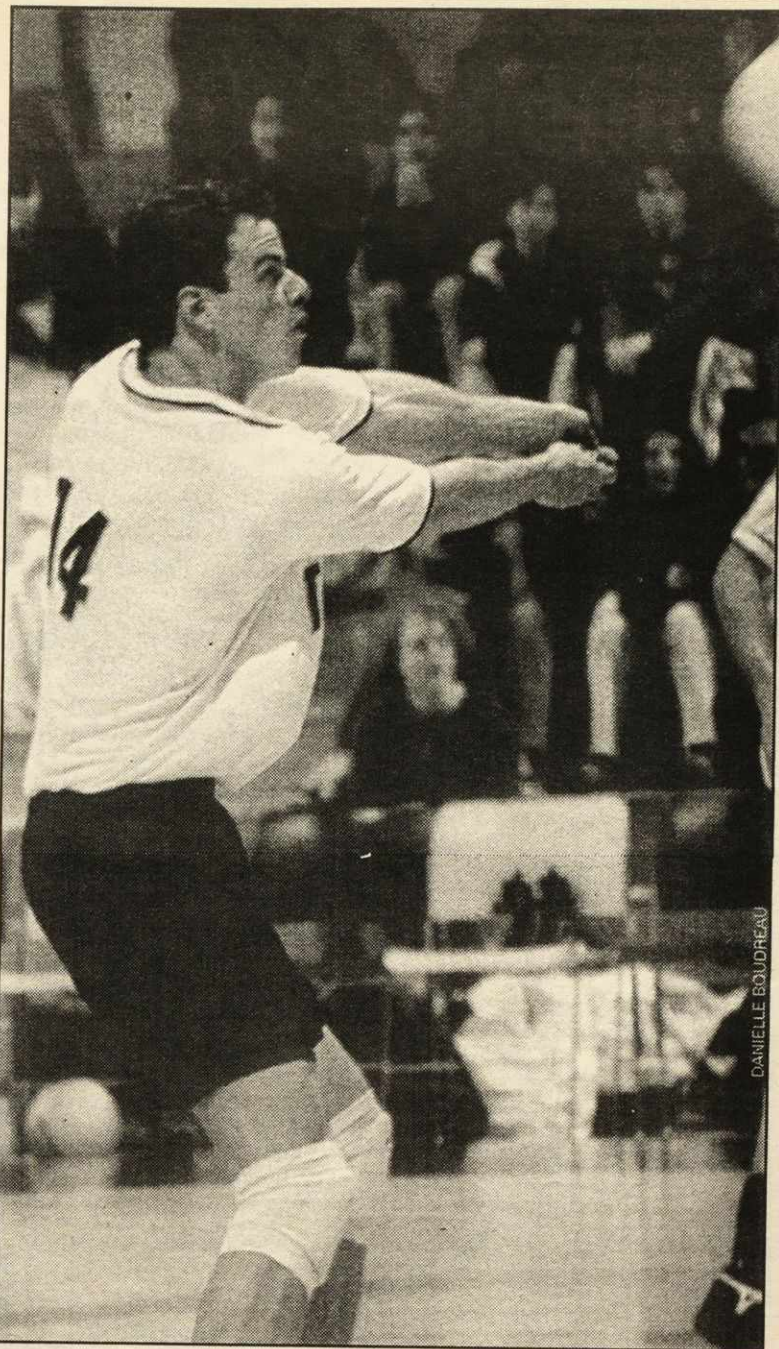
Ota notes that Villeneuve's influence also goes beyond the hardwood.

"Off the court, Eric is a guy that really has a tremendous influence on younger players; he really goes out of his way to make new players feel at home," he says.

"Eric is able to bridge a gap between rookies and the more experienced players," agreed Paul Villeneuve, Eric's older brother and former teammate. Paul, now an assistant coach for Dal, was a two-time All-Canadian for the Tigers. "Eric was a leader then, even though he was younger."

Paul notes, "Eric is a natural leader on the court. His leadership style allows the team to trust him; they know he'll do anything to win and therefore follow suit."

Daye Cox, a rookie setter for the Tigers, echoes the statement by noting, "Eric was an unbelievable



DANIELLE BOUDREAU

Captain Eric Villeneuve sets one up at the Digs Classic in January.

leader this year. He always seemed to know what to say at the right time. It was a great experience playing with him and I consider myself very lucky to have been able to play with such an amazing player and great leader. He will be missed."

While Paul said there may be some influence as an older brother, he admits, "Eric is certainly his own player."

"We are not just brothers but good friends as well. We are united by respect and understanding and know that through the tough times, we are there for each other."

On campus, Villeneuve was a member of the President's Advisory Council on Athletics from 1993-1995 and also sat on the Honor Awards selection committee and the Valedictorian selection committee in 1994. As with all other players on the volleyball team, he worked as a volunteer coach at the Dalhousie Superskills Volleyball Camp in all his five years at Dal.

When not playing volleyball, Villeneuve devotes his time to

various organizations, one of which is the Canadian Cancer Society. He works as a volunteer canvasser in both Ottawa and at the Lodge that Gives here in Halifax.

"I enjoy being involved in as many activities as possible. I particularly like to help with the Cancer Society since I like to give back to them after getting so much support in my father's bout with cancer," said Villeneuve.

His contributions to the community have been acknowledged as he was one of the AUSA's six nominees for the James Bayer Memorial Scholarship this month. The scholarship is awarded each year to the AUSA athlete that best displays outstanding abilities as both student and athlete, and for significant contributions to sport and society. Early this year, Villeneuve was also nominated for the CIAU TSN Award for the same qualities.

"He leads by example with his steadfast commitment to academics and off-court training. He's the model student-athlete at

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