

Killer Hornet Invasion In Texas

Chelsea volleyball phenom Lauren Buchanan ready for the next challenge at Texas Tech

BY LOYD MCINTOSH

Lubbock, Texas, you've been warned. A killer hornet is on her way to wreak havoc on volleyball courts throughout the Big 12 Conference and beyond.

Chelsea High School senior and volleyball phenom Lauren Buchanan is set to suit up for Texas Tech University this fall. The most decorated and accomplished volleyball player in Hornet history, Buchanan is looking forward to the challenge of helping a Red Raiders squad that went 14-16 in 2024, but is expected to be in the hunt for a conference championship in 2025.

"I'm just really excited to get out there," says Buchanan. "We have a really good recruiting class this year, and I'm just really excited to get out there and practice with all of the other girls."

A six-foot-one-inch outside hitter with loads of power from a deadly right arm, Buchanan was heavily recruited by many universities, but fell in love with Texas Tech right off the bat during a recruiting visit in 2023. "Immediately when I got off the airplane, I just knew that this was the place for me," she says.

A member of one of the "big four" NCAA athletic conferences, Texas Tech has world-class facilities and resources on par with many major universities, including four weight rooms, a state-of-the-art 15,000-seat



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF LAUREN BUCHANAN



arena, and a comprehensive academic support system for student-athletes. However, Buchanan said her decision to commit to Texas Tech in the fall of her junior year can be summed up in two words: culture and coaches.

"I got to watch a couple of practices and talk to some of the girls one-on-one, and they just told me how the coaches really care about you, on the court obviously, but they care about you more as a person," Buchanan says. "That really stood out to me."

"All of the people there are just all for the athletes," she added. "They really pour in a lot of time and hard work for them."

Buchanan grew up in Chelsea, first picking up the sport of volleyball in the city's youth program at age 10. Since then, volleyball has practically been part of her DNA. Even as she recovers from a broken foot she suffered earlier this spring, Buchanan can't wait to get back on the court. "I've been playing volleyball for about nine years and I love it more and more every single day," says Buchanan.

On the court, Buchanan's list of accomplishments is extensive. A four-year starter for the Hornets, Buchanan is Chelsea High School's all-time leader in kills (1941) and aces (336), was team captain during her junior and senior seasons, led the team to its first-ever AHSAA 6A Final Four in 2024 to finish the season third in the state, and was the North MVP for the 28th Annual Alabama North-South All-Star Volleyball game in July 2024.

Additionally, Buchanan earned dozens of local, state, and national recognitions, including 2024 All-Metro and Shelby County Player of the Year, and several American Volleyball Coaches Association (AVCA) accolades, such as AVCA/MaxPreps Player of the Week (twice in 2024), All-Region, and 2nd Team All-American.

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Buchanan was also a leader on her club team, Bama Elite, playing against some of the best teams all over the country. In the summer of 2024, she won a national championship with the elite club team Munciana 18 Samurai, which Buchanan says was “one of the coolest experiences I’ve had.”

Despite all of the awards and accomplishments, Buchanan remains humble and loyal, crediting her teammates, many of whom she has played with since middle school, and Chelsea High School Head Coach Jamie Gill, who was Buchanan’s first club team coach as a sixth grader, for her development as a player and a person.

“We are all on the middle-school team, and we won our little So-Con championship during our seventh and eighth grade year, so getting to play with them all throughout high school just meant a lot to me,” says Buchanan. “We grew really, really close, and it’s just like a little family.”

“Coach Jamie Gill at the high school was actually my first-ever club coach, so it was really special having her coach at the high school to be kind of like my first coach and then my last coach,” Buchanan adds.

Gill’s perspective of Buchanan is unique, having a bird’s-eye view of her development since she was a gangly 11-year-old. Gill says it was apparent Buchanan was a special athlete at a young age and had a “special drive” that set her apart from her peers.

“I believe her work ethic is unmatched these days. It takes a lot to be a high-level athlete, and she checks all the boxes,” says Gill. “She leads on the court and off the court, she’s highly respected by teammates and opponents and our coaching staff. She’s done things the right way with a lot of integrity.”

On the court, Gill says Buchanan’s physical skills made her one of the most intimidating players in the state. With excellent leaping ability and loads of power and strength, Buchanan was a headache for opposing players and coaches throughout her record-setting high school career.

“There were definitely teams whose game plan was how they could stop Lauren,” Gill says. “She hits with a lot of power, and she’s a very dynamic player. If you shift one way, she’ll hit it the other way.”

“She’s just really smart when it comes to making adjustments based on what people are trying to do against her,” Gill adds. “By her senior year, she was pretty unstoppable in most situations.”

As she prepares to leave Chelsea for the Lone Star State, Buchanan leaves a legacy far beyond wins, awards, and personal achievements. Buchanan is helping to develop the next generation of volleyball talent as a volunteer coach in the Chelsea youth program.

“I like volunteering to coach the youth leagues in the community,” she adds. “I’m helping coach a little fifth- and sixth-grade team right now, and it’s just been really fun.”

She’s also proud of the relationships she has made with her fellow seniors—Payton Walker, Kaleigh Hall, Cara Balcher, Lila Willet, and Presley Durham—and what they accomplished during their time together.

“We’re all friends outside of volleyball. We just really grew close together because we’ve played together since the seventh grade,” Buchanan says. “We were really able to rely on each other during our senior year. If one of us was down, we just picked each other up, and I think that made the season a lot more enjoyable—you know, one last ride with these girls. Let’s make the most of it.”



PHOTOS COURTESY OF LAUREN BUCHANAN
Above: Buchanan leaps to spike the ball over the net.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JAMIE GILL
Left: Buchanan with CHHS head volleyball coach Jamie Gill.