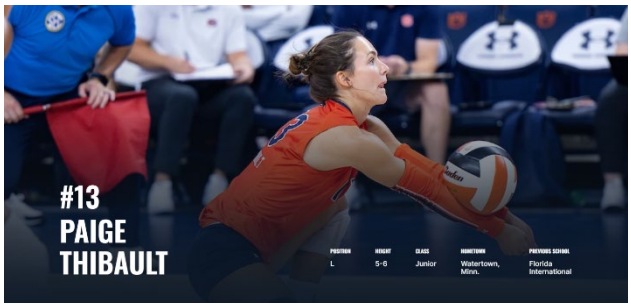
## An Inspiring Transition: From High School Athletes to Altamont's Volleyball Coaches

**By Audrey Thrower**

The 2025 Altamont volleyball season was one of change and success led by two brand-new coaches. Zoë LaBreche and Paige Thibault are Altamont's Varsity and JV coaches, respectively, who, after having successful high school and college volleyball careers, transitioned into coaching positions at Altamont. *The Acta Diurna* interviewed LaBreche and Thibault to learn about their journeys as volleyball players, the transition from being college athletes to coaching, and the most important lessons they learned during their first seasons of coaching volleyball at Altamont.




**When did you start playing volleyball?**

*Thibault*: "I started playing volleyball as [long ago] as I [can] remember! My mom was a coach, so she used to bring [my sister and me] to her practices every day. My sister and I were always running around passing a volleyball. My first organized club team was at 11 years old and the rest was history."

*LaBreche*: "I started playing volleyball when I was eight years old at the YMCA."

**Where did you play volleyball in high school? And was it hard to balance being an athlete and a student?**

*Thibault*: "I played volleyball at Watertown Mayer High school in Minnesota. I played varsity eighth grade through 12$^{th}$ grade and my sister played varsity with me as well! Being a student-athlete in high school was hard. I played high school volleyball then did high-school gymnastics competitively at the same time I played travel club volleyball. It was hard, but so rewarding. I learned how to manage my time well. I had to! In the end it was a blessing. Nothing prepares you more for life outside of high school than having a 3 pm to 11 pm day after a whole school day. My sister and I would joke that our time at school was our 'off time'."

*LaBreche*: "I played at Chelsea High School. I was homeschooled and then through the Tim Tebow Law I was allowed to play for the public school that I was zoned for. I would say in high school because I was homeschooled, I was able to work my schedule around athletics so that it wasn't as hard. So, in high school, it really wasn't bad."

**How was the transition from high school volleyball to playing in college? And what were some of your favorite moments and obstacles you faced at the college level?**




*Thibault*: “There is nothing that will prepare you for that transition. Being a college athlete is the hardest thing I’ve done in my life up to this point. Balancing being a full-time student and committing six hours minimum to your sport every day is heavy. Thankfully, my high school experience of competing in multiple sports at the same time did help me prepare, but college is just a different level. Some of my favorite moments include the ‘big’ and ‘small’ moments. Of course I loved the big wins, playing against huge schools like Texas and Kentucky, reverse sweeping teams [when a team loses the first two sets but comes back and wins the next three to win the game], winning at home, making it to the NCAA tournament, being in the top 25. But the best moments were in the training room with my best friends. A moment that defined it for me was senior night (my junior year). I have never been on a closer-knit team. That’s what it’s all about. Those moments, you know, the hard work, the waking up at 4:30 am day after day, the lifting, the injuries … it’s all worth it.”

*LaBreche*: “I think the hardest thing about the transition into college was that it was COVID year my freshman year. So that in itself was so bizarre. I would say one of the biggest obstacles was figuring out how to become yourself and fully develop into a person while also playing at the collegiate level. But with that, volleyball has brought me so many unique experiences. There is a huge sacrifice that comes with it, but it's worth it. I think probably getting the first Division One win as a program [was probably my favorite moment] and being able to do that alongside my childhood best friend.”

**What inspired you to coach volleyball?**

*Thibault*: “Coaching volleyball is in the blood. My mom coached at all levels, my dad played and coached all levels, my grandpa coached at all levels, every aunt and uncle coached. I was most inspired by my mom. She taught me and showed me how to be the greatest coach. How to develop great players and people. She has been inspiring and teaching girls at all ages from as young as I can remember. No matter her situation, I’ve always watched her create a winning team that loves one another. It’s unlike anything! She inspired me to be a coach.”

*LaBreche*: “I have had a few good but also a lot of bad coaches, and I want to be the coach that I'd never had … That's my motivation a lot of times. [After that,] I would say it’s giving back to the sport. I have gotten so much from [volleyball], and I love it so much and it's done so much

for me. That's my way of giving back. I'm going to teach everybody how to play volleyball, how to love volleyball, and how to fail with grace. [I want players to know] it's okay to make mistakes."

**How was your experience coaching volleyball at Altamont this past season?**

*Thibault*: "This past season was amazing. It was my first season coaching a team by myself. What could have been a nerve-racking moment became so fun and easy. This community is unlike any other I've been a part of. The players and parents made it such an amazing experience, especially as my first one!"

*LaBreche*: "Oh, it was the best. It was seriously the most fulfilling and refining season. I learned so much from [the team], and it really gave me a new perspective on coaching styles. [I learned] how to come up with my own style where I want the girls to feel like they can come to me. I want them to feel like they can ask questions or feel like I genuinely care about them, but then also not get walked on. But it was so fun, and I felt so welcomed by everyone. There was not a moment when I [felt] like an outsider and it made me feel so supported. I felt like I truly had an army behind me every time I went to a game and I love [the] girls so much."

**What was your favorite moment during the 2025 Altamont volleyball season?**

*Thibault*: "My favorite moment during this season was watching my team's growth. Each girl made leaps and bounds with their skill level and their teammate behavior. I was blessed with a great group and showing up every day to coach them made it all worth it! It was always fun to win a game, but practices were the best! I loved helping these girls develop in the practice gym so they could go prove themselves on the court. Seeing how excited and happy they were to win was always a cherry on top."

*LaBreche*: "So many moments that I absolutely love. I would say our first win as a team was just really cool. And then I loved our Indian Springs games. Those were so fun and competitive and it was so cool to see [the team] perform in a really intense environment but have fun with it. It was so fun to coach [the team] during that."

**Reflecting on this past season, what was the biggest lesson you learned as a leader?**

*Thibault*: "The biggest lesson I learned was how to better cater to my individual players. I learned how to pick up on cues, body language, and results of my players when I coached them certain ways. I learned that each player needs a different type of coaching and how to best fit the needs of the majority of my players."

*LaBreche*: "I have to be sure not to hold [the team] to a standard that I wouldn't hold myself to. It just taught me that I need to hold myself to a higher standard at all times and if [the team is not] meeting the standard, to find a way to either renegotiate this standard or find a way to help elevate [the team] there."

**Would you say that your experience as a high school and college athlete help you lead others?**

*Thibault*: “One hundred percent yes. Being a leader on my teams has taught me so many skills I hadn’t realized until I started coaching. How to have respect from players while also respecting them. Trust is a huge aspect. Learning to gain trust of players and express trust you have in them as a coach as well. How to listen to them, but also how to direct them in a way they will listen and learn. It’s a fine line, but once you find that line of trust, then that’s when a team really grows.”

*LaBreche*: “100 percent without a doubt. [When you are on a team] you [are] with people that are so different from you. Find what makes you similar, hold on to what makes you similar, and that helps you if you're a leader [and] it helps you be a good teammate.”

**Is there anything else that you think is important?**
*Thibault*: “Being a student-athlete is one of the greatest decisions you will make. It is one of the best things you can do for yourself to set yourself up for leadership and success in the future.”

*LaBreche*: “I would say find your identity and your worth outside of your sport and look at your sport as just an addition to [you]. I think it's so easy to get consumed by it. So, I would say branch out, find your hobbies, [and] find things that you really enjoy doing that are not your sport that allow you a space of peace outside of it.”