JUCO notes: Smith, Steben leading water polo teams

Hailey Smith and Erica Staben both attended high schools in Atherton, but they followed different paths to becoming the leading scorers on their community college women's water polo teams.

Smith is a sophomore transfer from Maryland, which discontinued women's water polo along with six other sports effective June 1. A standout at Menlo School, Smith was the Peninsula Athletic League Bay Division MVP her senior year with the Knights and scored 11 goals as a freshman with the Terps.

The 5-foot-9 utility player has scored 27 goals at Foothill College in Los Altos Hills, with the Owls off to a 7-0 start and ranked fifth in the state.

"Her coming to Foothill and playing at that level before coming back to this level, she raises the intensity of everybody on the team, which is great," Foothill coach Jeff Bissell said. "Her experience is great, in and out of the water."

Voted co-captain along with Joanna Short, not only does Smith make an impact on offense, she is the primary 2-meter defender for the Owls.

"When we play teams and we need to shut down one player or another, she's my go-to girl," Bissell said.

Smith also leads Foothill with nine assists, but sometimes just her presence in the pool is enough to aid returning All-America Anna Kim (second on the team with 13 goals).

"With teams trying to find Hailey in the water, they're kind of less focused on where Anna is," Bissell said.

The Smith-Kim dual threat also benefits centers Jamie Breen (Woodside) and Gurpuran Singh (Notre Dame-Belmont), who are often found isolated in front of the cage and have scored 12 and eight goals, respectively.

This week will mark a big test for Foothill,
which travels to San Luis Obispo for five games against high-caliber teams from Southern California -- starting Thursday with a match against No. 2 Riverside (9-0).

"We're preaching to them to stay humble," Bissell said. "It's easy to be the hunter, but it's hard to be the hunted. And they have to keep their head down and they have to keep working and they have to keep playing hard in order to achieve everything that they can this season."