

2025

AVCA Thirty Under 30 Club



Emma Celentano

Carolina Advantage Volleyball - Co-Founder & Director
&

University of Mount Olive - Former Head Women's Volleyball Coach

Career Accomplishments to Date:

- 2023 Conference Carolinas Coach of the Year
- 2023 Conference Carolinas Regular Season Champion
- 2022 & 20224 Conference Carolinas Division Champion
- 1 AVCA All-American
- 1 AVCA All-Region Selection
- 1 D2CCA All-Southeast Region Second-Team Selection
- 5 Conference Carolinas First-Team Selections
- 1 Conference Carolinas Defensive Player of the Year
- 1 Conference Carolinas Freshman of the Year
- 2 Conference Carolina Second-Team Selections

Coaching Roles:

- University of Mount Olive, Head Women's Volleyball Coach, 2019-2024
- Carolina Advantage Volleyball, Co-Founder & Director, 2022-Present
- North Carolina Central University, Assistant Women's Volleyball Coach, 2016-2019

What made you decide to get into coaching volleyball?

I finished my first year of college and I was back home for the summer, and my club director asked me to come in “help coach” her 16s. Upon reflection, all I was doing was playing and serving as a body to compete against, but she called it “coaching” and from there I was hooked. I started actually coaching club the following season and fell in love with the challenge of making an individual and a team better.

What are your career goals in the sport?

My career goals have shifted recently, but the core reasons I stay in the profession remain the same. I’m now fully committed to my club Carolina Advantage Volleyball. I want to develop athletes who love volleyball more when they leave our program than when they joined. Ideally, after college, they’ll return and help create an incredible experience for the next group. As I continue to invest in player development, I also want to keep growing as a teacher and stay innovative in how I coach within the youth volleyball space.



Which coaches have influenced you the most?

- I’ve always embraced being a learner—assisting at camps, observing other college programs, and regularly listening to coaching podcasts and reading Substacks. Through it all, my Co-Founder at Carolina Advantage and new head coach at NC Central, Jonathan Paulk, has been a constant collaborator.
- I’ve also been fortunate to play for amazing people like Stephanie Rhodes and Stevie Mussie, who showed me that truly caring for athletes beyond volleyball defines great coaching.
- Lastly, Joey Higginbotham, my Athletic Director at Mount Olive, modeled the lasting impact of genuine relationships, as seen in the loyalty of his former players returning year after year.

What do you enjoy most about your coaching job?

Nothing makes me happier than when an athlete's long days and countless hours pay off. Whether that's becoming an All-American, or learning to back set for the first time, or utilizing that tough experience they had sophomore year to get their dream internship. I just think sport and obviously volleyball specifically builds this perfect ecosystem to learn resiliency, and it's just the greatest reward to win and find success with people that had doubts at one time or really struggled with "x" and together we built a path to come out on the other side better than we were before.

