

2025

AVCA Thirty Under 30 College



Leah Saunders

Emory University
Assistant Coach

Career Accomplishments to Date:

- 2024 NCAA Division III National Quarterfinalist
- 2024 NCAA Division III Regional Champions
- 2022 NCAA Division III Regional Semifinalists
- 2021, 2023 NCAA Division III Regional Finalist
- 2024 University Athletic Association (UAA) Conference Coaching Staff of the Year
- 2022, 2024 University Athletic Association Conference Champions
- 2021, 2023 University Athletic Association (UAA) Conference Runners-Up
- 2024 AAU Volleyball National Runner-Up – 16 Elite Division
- 2022 USA Volleyball Girls Junior National Champions – 15 Liberty Division

Coaching Roles:

- Emory University, 2021-Present: Full Time Assistant Coach
- A5 Pure Volleyball, 2021-Present: 15s, 16s, 17s Assistant Coach
- Tsunami Volleyball Club, 2020-2021: 15s Head Coach

What made you decide to get into coaching volleyball?

Coaching has been my passion since I was in high school and continues to fulfill me each day. Sports have been a major part of my life and I have always had great relationships with my coaches. I have always been fascinated by how great coaches create connection between athletes and help them reach heights they didn't know were attainable. I want to be a part of athletes' journey to greatness and I want to be a part of something greater than myself.

What are your career goals in the sport?

Off the court, my goal is to help athletes achieve their potential as young people particularly as they prepare for life after sports. I want to contribute to a culture that prioritizes athlete-development and has open communication between players and coaches. On the court, I intend to support and develop elite athletes who thrive in competition and perform at an All-Region and All-American level. Once those goals are met, the expectation is to contend for conference titles and NCAA Regional and National Championships.



Which coaches have influenced you the most?

The coaches who have influenced me the most have been Jenny McDowell, Jona Braden, Bri Jones. They were the Emory coaching staff while I was a player and the people who inspired me to pursue a career in coaching. They have taught me about the game within the game. They exemplify how to build connection with people from different walks of life and grow with them in pursuit of a common goal. Everyday they inspire everyone around them to be the best versions of themselves and encourage athletes and coaches to pursue their dreams, unapologetically.

What do you enjoy most about your coaching job?

What I enjoy most about coaching is the journey that each team go through in a season and a career. Every season presents a new challenge for discovering strengths, and areas for growth. I love working with athletes and our coaching staff directly to create solutions, find paths to success, and achieve synergy. Every day is an opportunity to learn with everyone around you! Long term, watching athletes grow into who they are meant to be is incredibly fulfilling - being a part of their lives is an honor that I am grateful for every day.

