*The Best Thing I Saw at State*

# A Senior Season Rewritten for Laynie Guilbeau

*Northshore defied the odds to reach the state semifinals, while senior Laynie Guilbeau showed that commitment to a team goes far beyond what happens on the court.*

The *Best Thing I Saw at State* is a column that brings to life the moments that make high school sports so meaningful. Through the stories, emotions, and details that often go unseen at the state championships, it captures what the box score can't.




By Ethan W. Anderson

**LAFAYETTE —** Every high school athlete hopes their senior season will be a memorable final chapter. For Northshore's Laynie Guilbeau, it was a chapter she wasn't sure she would get the chance to write.

Her senior volleyball season was supposed to be the culmination of three years spent building her career at Northshore. But before that final chapter could even begin, an ACL injury threatened to bring her story to an unexpected end.

*Photos by Northshore High School*

What followed was a season filled with difficult decisions, unexpected setbacks, and a determination to remain part of the team she had grown alongside. It wasn't the final chapter she had envisioned, but it became one that reminded her what high school sports are truly about.

As we enter the 2026-27 championship season, we're excited to bring back our *Best Thing I Saw at State* series! After receiving such positive feedback last year, this series quickly became one of our favorite ways to share the stories that make high school athletics so special. More than anything, it gave us an opportunity to get to know the student-athletes, coaches, teams, and schools across Louisiana on a deeper level.




Throughout this championship season, we'll once again look beyond the final scores and championship results to highlight the people, moments, and stories that deserve to be told. Because sometimes, the best things we see at state have very little to do with what's on the scoreboard.

There are things a box score or stat line will never tell you. It won't tell you how much a senior looks forward to one final season with her teammates. It won't capture the sacrifices made along the way, the difficult moments behind the scenes, or what it means simply to be part of something bigger than yourself.

For Northshore senior Laynie Guilbeau, the 2026 volleyball season was never going to be what she had imagined.

After establishing herself as one of the Panthers' top players during her first three seasons, Guilbeau entered the summer looking forward to her final year of high school volleyball. Instead, an ACL injury threatened to take that opportunity away before the season even began.

The injury happened at the end of July during a summer camp. Guilbeau came down awkwardly, immediately sensing something was wrong with her knee.

"I knew something was wrong with my knee, but I didn't expect it to be something that could keep me out for the rest of my career," Guilbeau said.

*Photos by Northshore High School*

Her doctor presented her with two options: undergo surgery and end her playing career, or attempt to play with a brace, knowing she wouldn't be able to perform at the same level.

For Guilbeau, the decision was clear.

"I knew I wasn't ready for volleyball to be over for me, so I was willing to do whatever I could to keep playing," she said. "As soon as the doctor gave me the option to still play, I told him that was what I wanted to do."

It wasn't going to be easy, and it certainly wasn't going to look the way she had planned.

Rather than stepping into the role she had envisioned for herself, Guilbeau adjusted wherever the team needed her. She moved between positions, played on the right side when possible, contributed as a server, and found opportunities to help whenever she could.

Her role wasn't always consistent, but her commitment never wavered.

There were additional setbacks along the way. After being reinjured, Guilbeau faced another adjustment as the team had settled into its lineup and rotations.

"When I was ready to come back, the girls had settled into that lineup. I became the person who would go in if someone was struggling or wherever I was needed," Guilbeau said. "I did lose part of my role, but I feel like I made friends on the bench that I might not have made if I had been on the court. That was a huge part of my season, too."

It was a different experience than the one she had envisioned, but it gave her another perspective on what it meant to be part of a team.

From the beginning, Northshore's coaching staff made sure Guilbeau knew she still had a place in the program.

"Right when I got injured, the coaches came to me and knew I wasn't going to be ready to give it up," she said. "They told me they had a plan for me. They knew what I wanted and would do whatever they could to make it happen."

The support from her teammates also played a significant role in her decision to keep going.

"Seeing my teammates' faces when I got injured was a big driving point for me, knowing how much it meant to them and to me," Guilbeau said.

That commitment did not go unnoticed by those around the Northshore program.

Northshore Principal Bill Gallagher said Guilbeau represents the qualities the school hopes to see in all its student-athletes.

*Photos by Northshore High School*

"Laynie is the standard for what we hope all of Northshore student-athletes represent: determination, resilience, and passion," Gallagher said.

That commitment became part of a memorable season for the Panthers.

Entering the state tournament as the No. 12 seed, Northshore was hardly the favorite to make a deep postseason run. But the Panthers had other plans.

Northshore knocked off No. 5 Prairieville in the regional round before taking down No. 4 Chapelle in the quarterfinals to earn a spot in the state semifinals.

For a team that had spent the season overcoming its own challenges, the postseason run provided an opportunity to experience something special together.




And Guilbeau was there every step of the way.

Although her role on the court was limited by her injury, her place within the team never changed. She shared in the excitement of the victories, stood alongside her teammates through the challenges, and experienced the kind of postseason journey that will stay with a group of high school athletes long after their final match.

The Panthers entered the season with plenty of reasons for others to doubt them. They had lost their setter from the previous year and were bringing in a freshman who was playing the position for the first time.

But inside the program, the expectations were different.

"Every year, we've been confident that we can make it far, but this year there was something special. We all had so much hope and confidence, and we did it for each other," Guilbeau said. "Being the underdog was a big motivation for our school because everybody expects the Mt. Carmels, Dominicans and Chapelles to make it far, but nobody expects No. 12-seed Northshore to make it to state."

*Photos by Northshore High School*

She believes the team's chemistry was one of the biggest reasons it was able to accomplish what so many outside the program didn't expect.

"Nobody was expecting us to make it to state, but it was a huge part of proving everyone wrong because we knew what we were capable of and how strong our bond was," she said. "Skill is obviously important, but chemistry on the court is a huge thing, and I think we were very strong in that. We all knew we were better than what everyone expected of us."

The semifinal matchup brought another special connection for the Guilbeau family.

Northshore faced Mount Carmel, the school where Laynie's mother, Christine (formerly Zimmerman), once played volleyball before continuing her career at the University of New Orleans from 1997-2000. While her mother's alma mater stood on the opposite side of the net, her support remained firmly with her daughter and the Panthers.

"It's always a big joke with my mom, but at the end of the day, she is my biggest supporter," Guilbeau said. "She would want nothing more than for me to be able to experience a win against them."

Having a mother who played at the collegiate level also gave Guilbeau someone who understood the game from a different perspective.

"I have a different outlook on the game because she has the mindset of a college athlete," she said. "She is there to help with what she says before and after games. She has transferred so much of that to me, and that has helped me so much mentally, especially after going through an injury."

Northshore's season ultimately came to an end in the semifinals, but Guilbeau's senior year offered another reminder that the value of a high school sports experience cannot always be measured by a final score.

Despite the injury and the limitations it placed on her season, Guilbeau was also named an LHSCA All-Star, another recognition of the player she had been throughout her high school career.

"I was so excited when I heard the news because it made me feel like, in the past three years before my injury, the coaches had recognized me and knew me," she said. "I had built a reputation for being a good overall player, and it made me feel good that despite my injury, they were able to look past that."

For Guilbeau, the season may not have followed the path she originally envisioned. There were difficult decisions, unexpected setbacks, and moments when her role looked different than she had hoped.

But she still got what she wanted most: the opportunity to spend her senior year with her teammates, represent Northshore, and be part of a team that accomplished something special.

*Photos by Northshore High School*

When she looks back on her time at Northshore, the memories will extend far beyond wins, losses, and individual accomplishments.

"I think I'll remember the coaching and the friends I made. At the end of the day, I'm not going to look back at losses. I'm going to look back and remember all the happy things, all the bonds I made, and the coaches and how they helped me," Guilbeau said.

That perspective is part of what makes the high school sports experience so unique.

Guilbeau believes there is something special about playing for your school, particularly in a public-school setting where teammates grow together, overcome adversity, and develop a shared sense of pride.

"With club volleyball, you get a lot of girls who come in from everywhere, and they're experienced and pretty good. You put a lineup together and play," she said. "But with school, especially a public school, you have to work through more adversity together and overcome more things together. I think that helps build team spirit, school spirit, and a connection. Everyone knows we're the underdog, and that makes it more exciting."

As for what comes next, Guilbeau doesn't plan to continue playing volleyball at the collegiate level. She plans to attend Southeastern Louisiana University and pursue a career in nursing. However, volleyball won't be disappearing from her life just yet. She also plans to begin helping coach club volleyball, giving her an opportunity to stay connected to the sport in a different capacity.

Looking back, she doesn't dwell on what could have been or the season she initially imagined.

"If I could go back, I would just tell myself that everything is going to be okay. Everything turned out amazing. Obviously, it wasn't the way I wanted, but everything turned out good," she said.

Her advice to other athletes facing adversity is simple: don't give up when the path changes.

"It's not going to be easy, but giving up is never your only option. There's always an alternative."

Although her playing career at Northshore has come to a close, Guilbeau still has another important step ahead. She is scheduled to undergo surgery on December 18, beginning the next phase of her recovery.

Northshore's No. 12 seed may have defied the odds to reach the state semifinals. Guilbeau, meanwhile, found her own way to make a senior season that once seemed out of reach one she will carry with her long after her playing days are over.

Because sometimes, the best thing you see at state isn't just a team winning another championship. Sometimes, it's found in the commitment of a senior who simply wasn't ready to say goodbye to her team.

*Photos by Northshore High School*




***Author's Note:*** *In my role as the Director of Communications, I have the unique privilege of attending nearly all sanctioned LHSAA State Championship events. Although the schedule is demanding, I have the privilege of seeing student-athletes from all walks of life, united by two things: their participation in Louisiana high school sports and their pursuit of a state championship.*

*In my first year in this role, I've gained a deeper appreciation for high school athletics and for all the dedication that goes into making each season and event possible.*

*Although my current role involves less writing than my previous positions, it has given me the opportunity to return to something I've always loved. While much of my work now focuses on press releases and public statements, I also have the chance to reconnect with my passion for feature writing, this time highlighting what I consider the purest form of sport: high school athletics.*

*The goal is to highlight the best thing I saw at each state championship and share the unknown stories behind these events, capturing memorable moments for student-athletes, coaches, administrators, officials, and everyone who makes Louisiana high school athletics special.*

*Photos by Northshore High School*