

# Nepo set to make Huskers 'her team'

By MITCH SHERMAN  
Sports Editor

Fiona Nepo doesn't realize the size of the shoes she is attempting to fill this season.

"Pressure?" she said. "I don't really think about it."

Since 1981, nine Nebraska setters have been selected first-team All-Americans; a Cornhusker setter has been named to the all-conference team 14 of the past 15 seasons; and no U.S. Olympic women's volleyball team since 1984 has been without the services of an NU setter.

Nepo, a 5-foot-9 sophomore who has started only one match in her career, is asked this fall to become the next great Husker setter.

In addition to that legacy, Nepo follows Christy Johnson, a two-time first-team All-American who led Nebraska to its first-ever national title last December.

As Johnson, the Huskers' two-year team captain, motivated the team in every way imaginable, Nepo watched. When Johnson was injured

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TERRY PETTIT  
NU volleyball coach

— during a Sept. 22 match against Baylor — Nepo filled in, registering 34 assists in a Husker sweep. But the next day, she returned to the bench, filling in sparingly for the rest of the fall.

"Just by watching her," Nepo said, "I learned a lot. She took charge on the court. Christy is a great person to learn from. Coach (Terry Pettit) told me that, and I learned that by watching her."

Nepo came to Nebraska from Honolulu, the first Hawaiian to wear an NU uniform. She knows nearly every member of the Hawaii volleyball team, a group the rest of her teammates may meet Saturday in the championship match

of the season-opening State Farm/NACWAA Classic.

Hawaii, which lost to Michigan State in the finals of the West Regional last season, is ranked No. 1 in the preseason USA Today/AVCA coaches' poll. Nepo, who was expected to attend Hawaii, is looking forward to facing the Rainbows.

Pettit said she would be ready. "She is the most athletic player we have ever had at the setter position," he said. "It's going to take her time to be consistent, and it's going to take her time to be comfortable. But ultimately

she'll be a great player."

A year ago, Nepo was one-fourth of the No. 1-ranked freshmen class in the nation. She didn't expect to be a starter. One season later, she is more than just a starter; she is a vital piece of the team.

"Setters are very important because they touch the ball every play," said Jaime Krondak, who entered the NU program with Nepo last August. "She will be really good at it because she is so physical."

But like all players, Krondak said, Nepo will need time to adjust. During that adjustment period, her teammates will not lose faith in her ability.

Because of a sore achilles tendon, Nepo did not play Saturday night in the Huskers' Red-White scrimmage. She is expected to be at full strength for Friday's 7:30 p.m. season opener against Illinois State.

"Is this is my team right now?" Nepo said earlier this month before Nebraska began fall practice. "Not really. Give me a couple of weeks, and I'll give you another answer."

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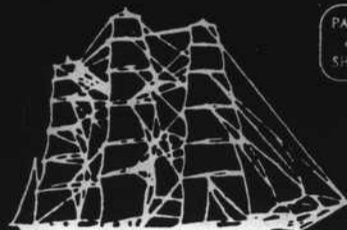
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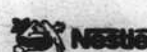
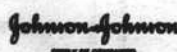
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