

Sports

New volleyball recruits to see action

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Of the seven new players on the Nebraska volleyball team this fall, three are likely to face redshirt seasons because of the return of five starters and two players with plenty of on-court experience.

But junior transfer Darla Melcher and freshman Kathi DeBoer stand

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a "good chance to play," this season, said coach Terry Pettit, who will begin the battle for a ninth straight Big Eight crown this Saturday against Wichita State.

Playing as a freshman isn't new. Four of this Saturday's Nebraska volleyball starters made the lineup in their freshman year and have been there ever since. A fifth starter made a chance payoff midway through her first year and has played ever since. The sixth player had to wait until her sophomore year to become a prime time player.

This season will not be a rebuilding year where someone new is needed to fill a spot or a role.

"Overall, this is a very experienced team," Pettit said. "For a freshman to contribute, she has got to come in and out-perform people to get a chance to play."

Pettit has seven returnees from a 29-4 squad that finished in the nation's top ten. When the NCAA and volleyball coaches' polls come out next week, the Huskers are likely to be in the top ten again. Melcher will start the season as the third setter behind three-year starters Cathy Noth and Mary Buysse. DeBoer, an outside hitter from Firth, Neb., has emerged as a factor in the competition for the four bitter positions.

DeBoer and sophomore Enid Schonewise, the only Husker recruit last year, are battling for the third outside hitter position. It is an important role, Pettit says. Since the third hitter usually substitutes for the shorter setter when the rotation takes that player to the front row.

"I've been working pretty hard at trying to get in," DeBoer said. "It's definitely a goal of mine. I would really like to play this year."

DeBoer accepted the scholarship to Nebraska after capping her high school career with a nomination to the Class B All-State team and as honorary captain of the Super-state team, which considers players from all classes of Nebraska high schools.

DeBoer drew attention from several schools, including Missouri and Iowa State. But Nebraska was her first choice.

Firth Norris reached state all four years that DeBoer played, making it to the semifinals last year. Her high school coach Karen Schlaeter credits DeBoer's hard work and determination for her success.

"She didn't stay stagnant," Schlaeter said. "She was always looking for ways to improve different aspects of her game. I think that's what makes a great player."

"I really like coming up here and watching them play. Everybody knows about Nebraska and how good they are. I wanted to be part of a successful program like this," she said.

DeBoer said thus far she is making the adjustments necessary to play on the college level. She is not overwhelmed to be so close to the starters, but she didn't expect to be.

"I knew Erin Dean (a senior last year) was leaving, and they had to replace her," DeBoer said. "I knew I could have a chance this season."

Pettit has noticed that DeBoer hasn't practiced like she's brand-new either.

"She's not performing like she's surprised to be out there with them," he said. "She seems to be very comfortable around the experienced players."

It hasn't surprised Schlaeter, who said DeBoer had the ability to play right away.

"It always takes a freshman a little time to adjust, but I've always felt like she could contribute to the team," she said.

The newcomers to the volleyball team:

Kathi DeBoer, Firth. "A lot of athletic ability, very quick and explosive" is the scouting report from Pettit. She is one of four outside hitters pushing for playing time.

Tisha Delaney, junior-college transfer from Jefferson, Mo. "It takes a year to adjust to college play at our level, which is why we're going to redshirt Tisha this season," Pettit said.

Delaney is a "very knowledgeable, savvy player," Pettit said. She will be expected to step in at setter next season after Noth and Buysse graduate.

Jenny Goff, Durango, Col. "Very intelligent, and fundamentally has a little bit more experience than the other freshmen," Pettit said. Goff needs more strength, but her intelligence may get her court time before some other new players, Pettit said. Goff is playing outside hitter.

Laura Hurley, Caldwell, Idaho. Hurley has played at outside hitter and defensive specialist in practice, and may later be given a trial at setter, Pettit said.



David Creamer/Daily Nebraskan

UNL freshman Kathi DeBoer... "I knew I could have a chance..."

"She reminds me of Cathy Noth...very very explosive, not really tall, but quite physically strong," he said. Hurley won the Idaho state track championships in the 100- and 200-yard dashes and the long jump.

"She's going to be a very good volleyball player," Pettit said. "We just need to get her to release some aggression on the court."

Darla Melcher, Beatrice. "Right now, she is probably our top defensive specialist and the third setter. The key to her playing a lot

will depend on her continued development."

The defensive specialist has been an important role for the Huskers in the past, Pettit said. If Melcher does an excellent job early she should see a lot of court time all season, he said.

Melcher will have a role model of sorts, since her sister, Lori, won all-Big Eight honors at setter in 1979 and 1980, and another sister, Wendy, played at UNO.

Tina Siefkes, Waverly. Another possibility to be redshirted, Siefkes "might be a pretty good defensive player, and may someday work into a role as a backcourt special-

ist," Pettit said. Siefkes currently is working at middle blocker behind Karen Dahlgren, Michelle Smith and Sharon Kramer — three underclassmen who also split those duties last year.

Michelle Stratbucker, Omaha. The Omaha Marian graduate also is working at middle blocker, and is being redshirted this season.

"Michelle came here with the understanding that she would need a year to redshirt," Pettit said. "I am very pleased with the effort she's making in practice. It's been helpful to her to see tall girls like Smith and Kramer play defense and do things well and with intensity."