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Nebraska middle blocker Virginia Stahr reaches for a spike attempt during the First Tier Volleyball Invitational earlier this season. Stahr's 104 kills rank her second on the Huskers.

Stahr says balance will help NU

By Mark Derowitsch
Senior Reporter

Since Nebraska middle blocker Virginia Stahr will be busier this year, she wants to make sure opposing defenses are just as occupied.

Stahr said she expects to be used more in the Cornhuskers' offense this season because of the overall balance of the team. The balance, she said, will make Nebraska more difficult to defend against.

"We're definitely pushing the ball up the middle more," she said. "Both (middle blocker) Carla Baker and I will be involved in the offense more because our attack is global. Kathi DeBoer was the main person last year, so we attacked to the outside most of the time. Now we have such a balanced attack and it will be harder for other teams to defend against it."

Nebraska volleyball coach Terry Pettit said Stahr will play a bigger part in the offense this season.

"We are a little more balanced and we have a number of attackers we could go to," he said. "Even when we win matches in straight sets, they last a long time so there's a lot of kills being made. Plus, we know that every time we get the ball to Virginia, she's going to make something happen because of her high hitting percentage."

Stahr, a junior from Waco, led the Big Eight and was ranked 3rd in the country with a .397 hitting percentage last season. She also had an .846 percent hitting game against Tennessee.

Stahr said setting in the middle more also will help the rest of the Huskers.

"In volleyball, you try to split the block," she said. "We try to make the blockers confused. By setting the middle more, the defense won't know where we'll go."

This season, Stahr's statistics have indicated that Nebraska is trying to push the ball up the middle more. She's No. 2 on the team behind Linda Barsness in kills with 104 and leads the starters with a .375 hitting percentage. She also has recorded 13 solo blocks.

"We might be attacking different this year, but I think we're a stronger team," Stahr said. "Coach Pettit is

always preparing for next year." With a stronger team, Stahr said, she thinks the Huskers have a good chance to reach the NCAA Final Four.

"That's our main goal," she said. "We want to get to the Final Four and then win the national championship. But we're not looking past anybody. We need to stop and play each game as they come."

Stahr said her taste of the 1986 Final Four still lingers. That season Stahr was a freshman on the Nebraska team that lost to Pacific in straight sets in the championship match.

"I was so overwhelmed by the whole thing," Stahr said. "When I'm put in a position like that, my brain gets turned around. I was so helter-skelter out there."

"It was great to play with all those great players, and I'm hoping to get back there."

To get to the NCAA Tournament, Stahr said, she knows the Huskers must first win the Big Eight title. She said Oklahoma's win against the Huskers in the 1988 Big Eight Tournament might give the rest of the conference some confidence that Nebraska can be beaten.

"The conference is always gunning for us," Stahr said. "Oklahoma thinks they can beat us again, but I guarantee we'll be ready for them. I guarantee we'll play well against Oklahoma this year."

Stahr, an elementary education major, said each player will have to do their job if Nebraska is going to capture the conference crown.

"Coach talks a lot about roles," she said. "My first two years, all I did was come in and play the front line. This year, I will play the whole rotation, and I'll also help the young players keep their confidence up."

Pettit said Stahr is a good leader on the team.

"She's taken on a lot more responsibility this year," Pettit said. "She plays her best in the tough matches and that shows she has matured as a player."

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