

Michelle Paulman/Daily Nebraskan

Freshman recruit Nikki Stricker sets the ball during a practice drill. Stricker was considered one of the best overall volleyball players out of high school last year.

Four newcomers to volleyball team already Huskers

By Cindy Wostrel
Staff Reporter

Although Nebraska volleyball coach Terry Pettit says he can get his players from "anywhere and everywhere," all four of this year's newcomers are from Nebraska.

Last summer, Pettit signed two scholarship players in Nikki Stricker of Lincoln East and Laura Luther of Grand Island. In addition, Kim Kinnan of Ogallala and Jessica Walter of Shickley walked on.

Pettit said he did not settle for second best when he went after Stricker and Luther. Both were early signers, committing to Nebraska in August instead of waiting until December or January, which is the normal time.

"They were the top two on our list," he said. "They were the people we wanted not because they are from Nebraska, but because they could do the best job for this program."

"Certainly, had Nikki or Laura been from Kansas or Minnesota, we still would have recruited them."

Pettit said Kinnan's and Walter's risk to walk on when they could have received scholarships elsewhere showed the strength, recognition and support of Nebraska's program.

Becky Bolli, a 5-foot-8 senior serving specialist, was in the same situation a few years ago, Pettit said. She walked on, turning down scholarship offers from other schools, and now "we're certainly glad she did," he said.

Bolli put in her time, proved herself and eventually earned a scholarship before her junior year.

"It takes a lot of courage to make that decision," Pettit said.

Stricker is listed as a setter, but could see action as a hitter. She admits there is pressure being a freshman on a team that is mentioned as a contender for the national championship.

Stricker, the first female athlete at Lincoln East to win 12 varsity letters -- four each in volleyball, basketball and track -- said she chose Nebraska because it is her home.

"Why leave a great program?" she said.

In picking Nebraska, Luther said, she too was sold on the strength of the program.

Stricker said she would have to see if she could adjust to the faster pace of a college team.

In college volleyball, "you have to think about 100 times faster" than in high school ball, she said.

Being from Lincoln, she has been able to follow Nebraska's program more closely than the others have, Pettit said.

"She knows the team as well as anybody coming to the program," he said.

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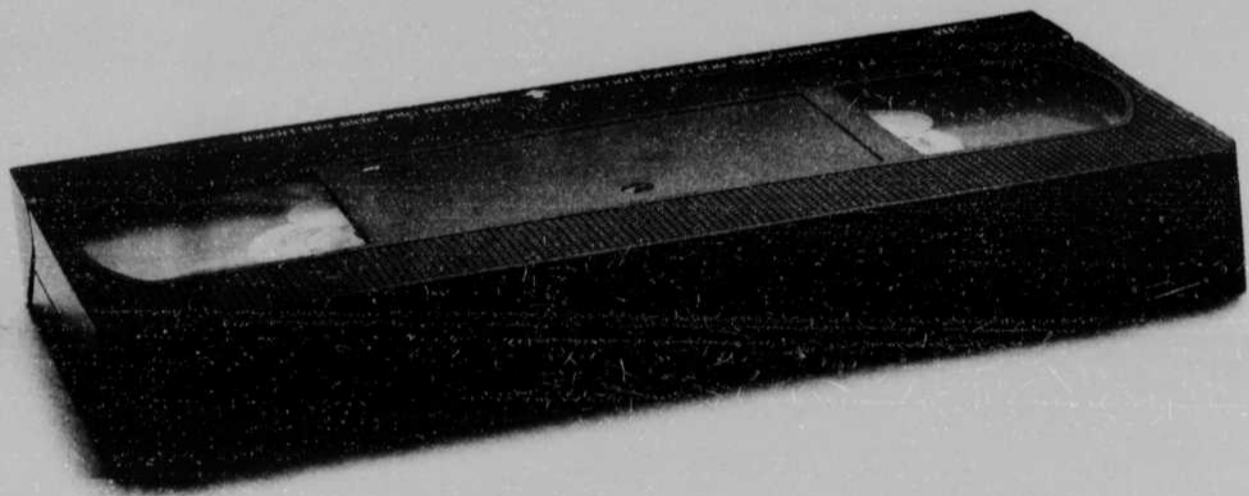
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