



KATIE JAHNKE practices with the Nebraska volleyball team Wednesday. Jahnke, a freshman from West Bend, Wis., missed last season with a knee injury.

MATT MILLER/DN

Husker duo back in action

Jahnke and Koziol are glad to be back at practice.

BY SHANNON HEFFELFINGER
Staff Reporter

Mention the summer of 1996 to Nebraska volleyball players Denise Koziol and Katie Jahnke, and neither can help but cringe.



Koziol

Billie Winsett.

But within those three months, Koziol, a native of Norfolk, and Jahnke, of West Bend, Wis., both suffered serious knee injuries. Expected to contribute heavily on the court, both were restricted to cheering from the sidelines during the Cornhuskers' second straight Final Four season.

Now, after spending last fall receiving daily rehabilitation treatments while their teammates practiced, Koziol and Jahnke are back on the court for spring workouts.

NU Coach Terry Pettit said joining the team on the court once again represents an important step physically and mentally in the two players' recoveries.

"I'm sure that just being able to be a part of practice is very good for them," Pettit said. "I know what it means to be an athlete and not be able to do the things you love to do. I'm

certainly rooting for them and I hope they can come back all the way."

Attempting to regain their previous form has been a long journey for both players, particularly Koziol, who has not played competitively for two years.

The 5-foot-11 outside hitter redshirted the 1995 season. After a year of adapting to the Huskers' system, Pettit thought Koziol might be a key contributor during 1996.

But Koziol's carefully laid plans were brought to an unexpected halt when she landed awkwardly while playing at the net during a preseason scrimmage, tearing her anterior cruciate ligament. Koziol remembers the moment vividly.

"I'd seen it happen so many times to people in high school," Koziol said. "As soon as I came down, I had a really bad feeling, and I just knew what had happened."

Facing another year of watching from the sidelines was almost too much for Koziol to handle at the beginning of the season, both physically and emotionally.

"I didn't go to practice at the beginning of the season because it was uncomfortable to sit," Koziol said. "And during the first match, I had to leave during warmups because it was so hard to watch."

The support and encouragement her teammates gave to her motivated Koziol to make a comeback. After seven months of rehab, Koziol is now practicing with the team three days a week but is limited to back row and defensive drills.

"Just being on the court is good for me," Koziol said. "It makes me feel like I'm progressing, even though it seems so slow."

Although Koziol is limited now, Pettit expects her to be ready to go during the fall.

"Just being on the court is good for me."

DENISE KOZIOL
NU volleyball player

"Denise's ball handling skills are really good," Pettit said. "I'm sure that she'll compete for a front-row role in the fall as well, and I'd hope Katie could do that also."

Jahnke — a member of the 1995 U.S. Junior National team — was forced to undergo reconstructive knee surgery in July after tearing the ACL in her right knee. Although less serious than Koziol's injury, Jahnke was restricted from playing competitively for the same amount of time and participated in a similar rehab program. And like Koziol, sitting on the sidelines while her teammates competed was difficult at first.

"It was hard to watch," Jahnke said. "I was frustrated at first, but I always knew I could get back."

"I've been waiting for a long time for this. The first time I practiced, it was really exciting. It was motivation, and I know I can do it."

Pettit said he is confident in both Jahnke and Koziol and has high hopes for them next fall.

"I certainly would expect that they'll be in position to play big roles," Pettit said. "They are very good players. We haven't lowered our expectations or our hopes for them."

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