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NU volleyball teams boasts of deep, experienced lineup

By SHANNON HEFFELFINGER
Assignment Reporter

Through 20 seasons as the head coach of the Nebraska volleyball team, Terry Pettit has learned no matter the situation, new challenges will emerge.

Last season, Pettit faced the task of replacing national player of the year Allison Weston, first-team All-American Christy Johnson and outside hitter Billie Winsett with players who had never seen significant playing time at the college level. Pettit was dealt another blow when Jen McFadden, Denise Koziol and Katie Jahnke suffered season ending injuries.

Pettit guided the young team — which included four new starters — to a 30-4 record, a Big 12 Conference championship and a Final Four appearance.

A new season brings a new challenge, which Pettit is excited to tackle.

This year's version of the Cornhuskers, Pettit's "deepest team in 15 years," has 16 players and nine returning letter-winners. Among them are two All-Americans, the Big 12 Conference newcomer of the year, and the national high school player of the year runner-up.

"Certainly, I'd rather have depth than not have it," Pettit said. "But it also creates challenges. It means that if you have three people competing for a position, that whoever wins that position will be a better player. But it creates the challenge of getting other people working in the same direction — not having people so consumed with just their own role that they lose sight of the team role."

"We've done a good job of that in the past three or four years. Everybody has bought into the idea of sacrificing some individual things for the greater good, and I think we'll work very hard at that again."

Pettit will have little to decide at the setter and right-side hitter posi-



MICHAEL WARREN/DN
VOLLEYBALL COACH Terry Pettit faces the task of replacing two seniors and finding time on the court for 16 players this season. Nebraska, the defending Big 12 champion, advanced to the Final Four a year ago.

tions, where first-team All-Americans Fiona Nepo and Lisa Reitsma return.

Nepo finished second in the conference last season with 13.7 assists per game. Reitsma, the Big 12 player of the year, pounded five kills per game.

"Fiona and Lisa are among the best players at their positions in the game," Pettit said. "But for us to play at a higher level this year, they're both going to have to improve in big matches and at critical times."

Other than those two positions, competition exists all over the court, Pettit said. In the two weeks before the season begins, a total of four starting positions must be decided.

Junior Jaime Krondak returns at outside hitter. A starter last year, she averaged 2.9 kills per game and posted 387 digs — the second highest total in school history. Other than Krondak, Pettit said, five players will battle for time, including junior

Renee Saunders, sophomores Mandy Monson and Denise Koziol and freshman Kim Behrends.

Sophomore Nikki Henk also could play outside hitter. Last season Henk averaged 3.98 kills per game while competing for the College of Charleston. She is only the second transfer in NU history.

Freshman Nancy Meendering could also compete for time on the outside, but said she will probably redshirt.

"Jaime certainly proved last year that she has the potential to be a great player," Pettit said. "Assuming that she wins that position, we're going to have some very good people competing for the other one. There may even be a couple of people sharing it for awhile."

Talent also exists at the middle blocker position, Pettit said, where junior Megan Korver and sophomore

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