

Behrends finds role in NU attack

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affects me, but I know how to get rid of it.

"When I was younger, I'd just keep it on my shoulders. And keep it, and keep it. And it just kept building up, building up. And then, finally, I was like... (makes a noise with her lips). So, I think I handle it a lot better."

Behrends' mental happiness progressed, she said, when she finally started telling people about her frustrations. She got good therapy from many of her teammates, including fellow western Nebraska native Oxley, who Behrends said is like a sister to her.

The two go as far back as seventh-grade, when they played together on an Ogallala spring club team, which Behrends' father coached.

Oxley remembers how Behrends drove 45 miles to Ogallala twice a week to play on the team, and the impact she made in the gym physically.

"We'd always look up to her,"

Oxley said. "Since seventh grade, it seems like she's been six feet tall. She always brought that kind of presence. She's very intimidating."

The two kept in touch and followed each other throughout high school and both ended up playing for Nebraska. Oxley said they're proud they made it in major college volleyball.

"Every girl out West dreams of becoming a Husker," Oxley said. "People don't think small towns can provide the resources (to make you successful)."

But while Oxley gave up her red-shirt eligibility to become the Big 12 freshman of the year, Behrends saw limited playing time. Behrends' sophomore year wasn't much different, and she hated it.

Behrends was bottling up her emotions, she said. But she was also bottling up the dangerous power that was always stored in her right arm.

And finally, after a long and bumpy road, Behrends is getting playing time and unleashing that power. She still competes with Oxley and

senior Mandy Monson for the left-side spot and still does not start or get the press they do.

But unlike before, she's happy. Bubbly. Why? Because she has a role on the team that Pettit considers priceless.

"I think Behrends is just a great middle-game to end-game player," Pettit said. "When you've been out there for an hour-and-a-half, and bodies are laying all over the place, she comes in. The best metaphor is the fast ball relief pitcher in baseball - somebody that just comes in and is throwing the ball five miles per hour faster than the person she replaced."

And Behrends, much unlike her first two years, is enjoying the role Pettit has given her.

"In that Penn State game, I tipped a ball, and he yelled at me," Behrends said. "He told me to kill every ball that comes at me. That's my role. I like trying to hit someone - knock them down."

And going down with her opponents are those player-of-the-year demons that haunted her. Finally.

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