

# Cepero battles pressure of the can't-miss label

## CEPERO from page 8

So it was basketball at 2, volleyball at 7. Club level not long after that. Her sophomore year in high school in Bayamon, Puerto Rico, she knew sports was her future meal ticket. Then she knew she had to leave her hometown of Dorado to go to "the States."

Greicha, as most call her, went to Philadelphia for a summer basketball league, where she was discovered for that sport. Her ability in volleyball had been discovered already in Puerto Rico. Then came a short stint at a high school in Florida, where she knew she wouldn't learn English well enough. So she went to Baltimore her senior year. And she learned English.

She watched nearly every college volleyball and basketball coach in America offer her a scholarship. She listened to coach after coach try and persuade her away from Nebraska by telling her it didn't have flights to and from Puerto Rico. She came anyway.

"I am the most blessed person in the world," she said, "now that women are having the recognition in sports, and people are starting to follow us. People in this state live for the University of Nebraska."

Her smile disarms, but she has a pose of poise that would make Daisy Buchanan proud. Her fingernails are painted, even for practice. She wears blue dolphin earrings. And she hasn't perfected the standard poli-sports answer to the hard questions yet. Which is perfect.

She is the next big thing, though you might not know it. Her fanfare foreshadows the future, though you might not see it. But you will soon.

Not only for who she is but what she represents.

So, a primer for getting to know the female sports phenom - the diva for the 21st century.

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On media day for the 1999 Nebraska volleyball team, as Cepero was fiddling around in the corner, NU Volleyball Coach Terry Pettit announced it to all in the room.

"Greicha has more poise than probably anybody in this room," Pettit said. He was including himself in that statement.

Pettit and Nebraska Women's Basketball Coach Paul Sanderford bubble at Cepero's ability. Sanderford says WNBA. Pettit says she has the talent of players in Cuba - which is tops in international volleyball.

She is 6-foot-2. She can run. She has a 30-inch vertical. She could play any position, if asked to, in either sport.

What positions will she play? In volleyball, Pettit says she could be one of the greatest setters in college volleyball history.

For now, she is an outside hitter who adds to NU's power in the 6-2 offense. She is third in kills on a team that has one of the nation's most dominant players in Nancy Meendering. Earlier in the season, she occasionally fell back into setter mode, knocking into players on the court going for the ball.

Still, the setter prophecy is possible. Consider this: If Fiona-Nepo were dominant at 5-9, what could Cepero do with 5 more inches?

"Her talent," drawls Sanderford, "is pretty amazing. Oh, she can play

the game."

He is referring to basketball, where he'd like to see her play small forward. Cepero isn't playing basketball this year because the Huskers don't have a scholarship for her. But she will next year, after volleyball ends, and she will probably play basketball one year after her volleyball career is over.

Basketball is her passion, her original love. But she'll take the Olympics in either one. In volleyball, she hangs suspended above the net; she's quick enough to dig and a good enough server to hit five aces in a match. And she isn't even playing the position she's been seasoned to play. And it isn't even the sport she was most coveted in.

"Whatever Greicha sets her mind to," Pettit said, "she can do. There isn't any doubt. Greicha knows she wants to be."

So let it be written.  
So let it be done.

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She is part of a new generation, a movement if you will, of women who didn't exist 10 to 15 years ago. Not with this type of hype. Not this kind of fanfare.

She knows it, acknowledges it, is well aware of the advances women before her have made, buoyed by the Title IX law signed 27 years ago that threatens every minor male sport in a strained athletic department budget.

After the Oklahoma match, not long in NU's past, she stood among a sea of young girls who thrust their T-shirts, programs or volleyballs in her face. Pen in her mouth, she signed as many as she could as the girls, who are not necessarily aware of who she is or what talent she has, came at her in wave after wave after wave.

She stood and signed the longest among her teammates after that match, standing 30 minutes, with a foreign T-shirt in her hand and not a girl to claim it at the end of the night.

Most of these young girls seek no particular individual but rather a concept, the idea of being a woman athlete. So there is pressure.

"It's scary," Cepero said. "I just get anxious. I just want to get on the court and start doing, start playing. At that moment, I don't think about it."

"But then I'm off the court. And I look up, and I was like, 'This is one of the best programs in the nation and this college level, and this is NCAA and this is Division I,' and it all rushed through my mind, and I'm like, 'Oh.' I get it now. And I look at the fans, and I see what we mean to them. I know that they think what we do is pretty cool."

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There are times when she wonders what her teammates must think of her. She is close to them all, but still, is there jealousy? It'd be selfish of them. But human, too.

Such an observation requires, for whatever reason, a lowered voice. Nearly a whisper.

"It becomes scary at some point. It can be pressure. Thank God my parents just tell me to work hard and have fun. I just want to prove everything they say about me is true."

GREICHALY CEPERO  
NU volleyball player

"Coach will tell me, 'Greicha, go in there and pass,' and I do it. I do it right. Then he'll tell me, 'Greicha, go hit it on the left side,' and I do it right. Then he says, 'Go on the right side.' I do it right."

"There are people who just play that position. When you go here and go there and go back and just do it, and you can set, too. ..."

"I don't ... sometimes ... if ... sometimes I think if I would be them, I would be like, 'Oh my God, she just goes in there and does it, I mean, it doesn't seem like it's difficult for her at all.'"

"It makes me feel bad sometimes. Sometimes I'm scared that the other players are like, 'Oh my God, she's just a freshman and look at how much they talk about her.' Even before the season, they were talking about how much potential I had."

"Do I intimidate other people? Yeah. And I like that. I want to. But not with my teammates. Not ever with them. I love them."

She remains humble. Cepero doesn't think she intimidates opponents right now - that's Meendering's job.

"Now Nancy, they're scared of," she said. "Me? Not yet."

And by all accounts, Cepero is one of those people who can balance her ability and popularity, based largely on her lighthearted personality.

"She's so fun and easygoing," roommate and NU middle blocker Amber Holmquist said. "It's a positive thing for us as a team."

Said Pettit: "She's on solid ground. A centered person. She knows who she is. And you respect that. She's such an open person. Her heart and her focus is on this team, not on herself. And that I can say about everybody on this team, from the best athlete to least talented."

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Cepero's athletic predestination was clear from a young age. She learned everything she could from her father, Pedro. She adopted his passions. Her future is now, her past is present. She cannot turn her 6-2 frame away from all this. Even if she wanted to.

"I had never thought about me that way before here," she said. "I mean, I knew I have potential. But it never came from the college coaches like this. Just to come in before two-a-days started and to hear (Pettit) say how

much potential I had, it hits home.

"It becomes scary at some point. It can be pressure. Thank God my parents just tell me to work hard and have fun. I just want to prove everything they say about me is true. I want to live up to those expectations."

"Most of the time I'm like, 'I don't have to prove nothing to nobody' - I know what I can do and how much I can give. But you still want to do it. Because you don't want to let down those people and those expectations."

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This 'sports is my life' thing Cepero talks about? Pettit doesn't buy it.

"Every athlete is like that," he said. "I felt like that. My daughter (a setter at Colorado State) felt like that. But the passion for sports can carry over into other things."

"Greicha attacks everything that way. We're talking about a girl who takes Japanese in her first semester in college and does well in it. She approaches everything she does the same way."

"Years down the line, Greicha Cepero will do something great outside of the field of sports."

This potential thing is all-encompassing.

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Aaron Babcock and Rhonda Revelle play the unwitting stars in ending this tale.

It is directly after Cepero's interview. And Babcock, the NU sports information director for volleyball, lounges against a column in the NU Coliseum. Revelle, the Cornhuskers' softball coach, walks by.

And they talk about recruit Peaches James, a phenom in her own right, a senior softball pitcher at Papillion-LaVista High School who had a 0.04 earned run average this season, winning 79 of 85 games and striking out 852 batters over three years. Another girl that, 10 or 15 years ago, probably wouldn't have had her talent as cultivated as it is now.

And Revelle's final statement before going out the door, in a sense, proved why these athletes exist now. It nailed the existence of Cepero at Nebraska. And, somehow, it guaranteed the future of Greichaly Ceperos to come.

"I'm going to a softball clinic," she said. "Time to work with the 8-year-olds."

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## N Sport Clubs

### At Home this Weekend

NU Women's Soccer takes on Kansas State this Sunday at 2:00 p.m. The game will be played at Whittier Field (22nd & W Streets).  
-Rain site - Cook Pavilion-

NU Water Polo will host Lincoln Southeast High School Sunday at 7:00 p.m. The game will be held at the Mabel Lee Hall Pool. FREE!

### Fri. & Sat. Night

HOCKEY - At the Ice Box following the STARS game against Dordt College. NU will play again Saturday night at 9:15 p.m.

For more information regarding any of the UNL Sport Clubs events - Please contact the Office of Campus Recreation 472-3467

### Show your support for NU Sport Clubs!

Check out the **Canoe & Kayak Club**  
booth Nov. 11 & 12 9:00 A - 2:00 P  
at the City Union for your photo card!

### Results

NU Women's Soccer beat Kansas State Sun. Nov. 7. The win came after a shoot out, where team members Tricia Bair, Amber Neubert, Amanda Hanson and Megan Driesen scored. Amber Neubert scored NU's goal tying KSU 1-1 sending the game into double OT & ending in the shoot out.

## NU beats Buffs, now 1st in Big 12

From staff reports

Nebraska volleyball is in the familiar position of sitting atop the conference standings, after a four-game victory over Colorado and a Texas loss to Kansas State.

Nebraska improved to 20-5 overall and 12-3 in conference play with a 15-10, 9-15, 15-5, 15-11 four-game struggle in Boulder, Colo.

Nebraska Head Coach Terry Pettit admitted that his team lacked its usual quickness at times but was still pleased with the victory.

"I was concerned about fatigue coming into the match, and I think that played a part," Pettit said. "But sometimes you just have to find a way, on the road, to get an ugly win."

It was freshman middle blocker Amber Holmquist who continually came up big for NU, pounding out a

career-high 15 kills.

All-American Nancy Meendering was her typical self, pouring in the floor-high of 22 kills for the match.

The Huskers appeared ready to dominate proceedings, after jumping to a 13-0 lead in game one, before a furious 10-1 rally by Colorado. Nebraska eventually put down the final point to take the game 15-10.

The Buffaloes (15-9, 9-6) battled back in the second game behind Sonja Nielsen, tying the match at one game apiece. Nielsen led the Buffaloes with 18 kills on the night.

Nebraska gained back the match lead with a .486 hitting percentage in the third game on route to a 15-5 win.

On a night when Texas lost, and Nebraska struggled, Pettit was happy to survive this Boulder trip.

"We beat a ranked team on their court, with us not playing our best match," he said. "I think that says a lot."