

Sports

Penn State swipes No. 1 from Florida in AP's Top 20 poll

Associated Press

Penn State has become the fifth team to reach the top of The Associated Press college football poll this season, ending Florida's one-week reign.

The Nittany Lions, second a week ago, boosted their record to 9-0 by defeating Cincinnati 31-10 Saturday and took advantage of Florida's 24-3 loss to Georgia, which dropped the Gators to 11th place.

Penn State received 44 of 59 first-place votes and 1,143 of a possible 1,180 points Monday from a nationwide panel of sports writers and sportscasters.

The rise to the top capped a season-long climb for Penn State, which was 19th in the first regular-season poll and has since been 11th, 10th, ninth, eighth, sixth, third and second. Oklahoma, Auburn, Iowa and Florida had previously been ranked No. 1 this season.

The No. 1 ranking wasn't expected to excite Penn State Coach Joe Paterno. Following Saturday's game, he said: "As I've always said, nobody's anything until the season's over. That's exactly the way I feel about it."

Nebraska, which crushed Iowa State 49-0 Saturday, moved up from third place to second with nine first-place votes and 1,083 points. Ohio State trounced Northwestern 35-17 and went from fourth to third with two first-place votes and 1,021 points.

Air Force, the nation's only 10-0 team, rose from fifth to fourth with two first-place votes and 941 points by routing Army 45-7 and Iowa went from sixth to fifth with 905 points after walloping Illinois 59-0.

Miami of Florida, a 29-22 winner over Maryland, vaulted from eighth place to sixth with 891 points. The remaining two first-place votes went to Oklahoma, which held seventh place with 883 points following a 51-6 romp over Missouri.

Michigan moved up from ninth to eighth with 744 points by drubbing Purdue 47-0. Arkansas leaped from 12th to ninth with 662 points by downing No. 11 Baylor 20-14, and Oklahoma State, which beat Kansas State 35-3, remained in 10th place with 646 points.

The 20 teams in this week's poll are the same as last week, with some shuffling.

The Second Ten consists of Florida, Georgia, UCLA, Auburn, Florida State, Brigham Young, Baylor, Tennessee, LSU and Alabama.

Last week, it was Baylor, Arkansas, Auburn, UCLA, LSU, Florida State, Georgia, BYU, Tennessee and Alabama.

Ag spiker deals with new position

By CHAREAN WILLIAMS
Assistant Sports Editor

When starting middle blocker Stacey Smith went down with a knee injury against Texas Southern Oct. 16, it dealt a big blow to the Texas A&M volleyball team.

But perhaps no one felt the repercussions more than starting outside hitter Margaret Spence.

That one play suddenly had Spence playing a new position — or at least learning to play a new position.

"I get real frustrated at times," the 5-foot-11 junior said, "because I feel like I'm not doing well. I have put a lot of pressure on myself. I learn something new all the time, and I try to adjust to it. I guess I will eventually improve."

Having little experience in the middle before Smith's injury, it's been quite an adjustment for Spence.

"One difference, of course, is the sets," Spence said. "They come from the middle instead of the outside. On the outside, you get short sets. It's a lot quicker. In the middle, you can take your time and try to fool (the other team). Also on the outside, you have two blockers on you. In the middle, it's just me against the other middle blocker."

The Aggies' other starting middle blocker, senior All-American Sherri Brinkman, has helped make the transition easier for Spence.

"When I first started playing the position, Sherri gave me some tips," Spence said. "And I have learned a lot just by watching her."

She also has a newfound respect for middle blockers.

"The middle works your butt off," Spence said. "You have to be on your toes all the time."

Smith began practicing last week, and is expected to see limited game action Wednesday night against Houston. All of which leaves Spence smiling.

"I am enjoying it," she said, "but I am looking forward to Stacey coming back. It's her position, so she knows more of what's

going on."

And since the spring of her freshman year, the outside has been Spence's domain.

"In the spring of my freshman year, I first started to love the game of volleyball," she said. "It was a whole new ballgame to me after that. I felt like I could finally play with the All-Americans."

Last year Spence ruled the outside, earning All-Southwest Conference honors with a .294 hitting percentage.

"I really enjoyed last year," she said. "I didn't expect getting All-Southwest Conference at all. I just felt like I was contributing to the team. I felt like I was counted on out there."

And this year, perhaps more than last, the Aggies have really counted on Spence.

She is leading the team in digs with 264 (2.63 per game), is second in blocks with 47, and is third in hitting percentage at .248.

"I feel like I'm pretty strong on defense," Spence said. "Defense is such a challenge to me. It's fun to read somebody, and digging a hard ball feels real good."

"I need to improve on my hitting. I want to get to the point where nobody can dig my hits."

At Clear Lake High School in Houston, Spence did just that.

She was All-District for three straight years, was selected to the high school All-State team her senior year and played in the coaches' All-Star game.

Having two brothers at A&M, and a friend on the Aggie volleyball team, there was never a doubt where Spence would attend college.

"My junior year, I had an eye on A&M," she said. "Then my senior year, I committed at the beginning of October. I felt good about my decision. I had no doubts. I knew it was home the first time I visited. I wouldn't have been this happy anywhere else."

And three matches in particular make Spence even happier with her decision.

"The San Diego State match last year, when we upset them, was great," Spence said. "We

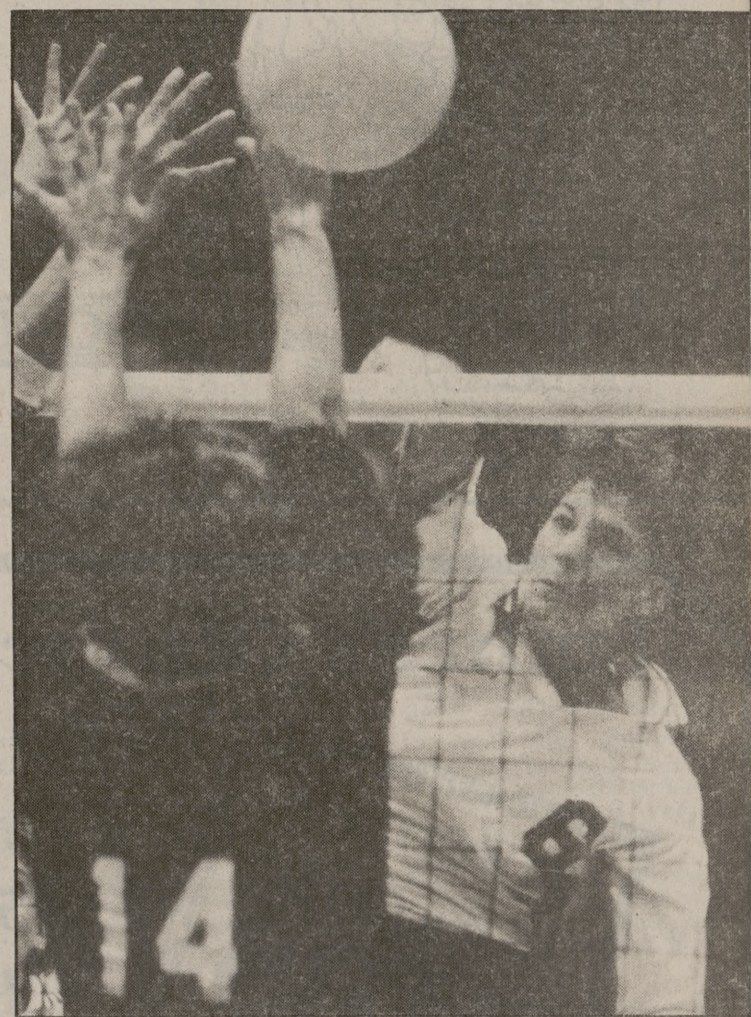


Photo by JOHN MAKELY

Texas A&M's Margaret Spence (6) has found herself spiking the ball past opponents in the middle instead of the outside this season.

were't even supposed to be able to play in the same gym with them. Then this year, it was the same thing with Purdue. We were down 14-7 and came back and won. The best game I've had personally was against (Texas) Tech last year at home. We drove them out of the gym."

An exercise technology major, Spence has definite plans for the future.

"I'm not going to graduate on

time," she said. "I'll stick around after volleyball. When I graduate, I plan on going into corporate fitness. That's the latest craze."

But guess what that final year of volleyball holds in store for Spence.

"It looks like I'll be the middle blocker since we're losing Sherri," she said. "I guess it's good I'm playing there now because I'm going to be there next year. I might as well be working for it."

AP Top 20 Poll

The Top 20 teams in the Associated Press college football poll, with first-place votes in parentheses and season record:

1. Penn State (44) — 9-0-0
2. Nebraska (9) — 8-1-0
3. Ohio State (2) — 8-1-0
4. Air Force (2) — 10-0-0
5. Iowa — 8-1-0
6. Miami (Fla.) — 8-1-0
7. Oklahoma (2) — 6-1-0
8. Michigan — 7-1-1
9. Arkansas — 8-1-0
10. Oklahoma State — 7-1-0
11. Florida — 7-1-1
12. Georgia — 7-1-1
13. UCLA — 7-1-1
14. Auburn — 7-2-0
15. Florida State — 7-2-0
16. Brigham Young — 8-2-0
17. Baylor — 7-2-0
18. Tennessee — 5-1-2
19. LSU — 5-1-1
20. Alabama — 6-2-1

Others receiving votes: Arizona State, Bowling Green, Texas A&M, Notre Dame, Texas, Utah, Colorado, Fresno State, Minnesota.

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