

Smedsrud aims for repeat of excellent first season

The sophomore outside hitter became the first-ever freshman all-SWC performer in 1994.

By Philip Leone
THE BATTALION

As a freshman outside hitter on the Texas A&M volleyball team in 1994, Kristie Smedsrud just wanted to fit in and contribute. Several school records and Player of the Week honors later, Smedsrud became the first freshman to receive first team All-Southwest Conference honors in SWC history.

Not bad for someone who said she did not feel comfortable on the court until several matches into the season.

"Being young and fresh out of high school, I really didn't know what to expect at first," Smedsrud said. "But after we played in some tight matches, I was able to relax and feel comfortable with what we were trying to do as a team."

Besides being named SWC Freshman of the Year and earning a spot on the conference all-tournament team, Smedsrud finished the season with a team-leading .252 hitting percentage and broke the A&M freshman record for kills in a season with 358.

Texas A&M Head Volleyball Coach Laurie Corbelli said she expects Smedsrud to do even better this season, although it may not be as apparent.

"I think you can expect another outstanding year from Kristie," Corbelli said. "It won't be as noticeable because she won't be a freshman anymore."

Smedsrud also excelled in the clutch for Corbelli, setting school records for kills and block assists in matches against the nationally ranked University of Texas and Brigham Young University.

All of these successes came to Smedsrud after she came out of San Diego's Grossmont High School, the 6-foot-1 inch Smedsrud was heavily recruited by several of the nation's top volleyball programs.

She honed her skills and received valuable exposure by playing for the prestigious San Diego Volleyball Club, which competes against high-caliber opponents from across the nation. Despite all the California experience, Smedsrud decided to leave the state to continue her career.

"When I came to visit the A&M campus my senior year in high school, I just fell in love with the college-town atmosphere and the school spirit," Smedsrud said. "I'm still not used to the heat, though."

Smedsrud endured plenty of the Texas heat this summer when she stayed on campus for rigorous weight training and running sessions. Smedsrud said she took on the grueling workouts to continue to live up to her peers' expectations.

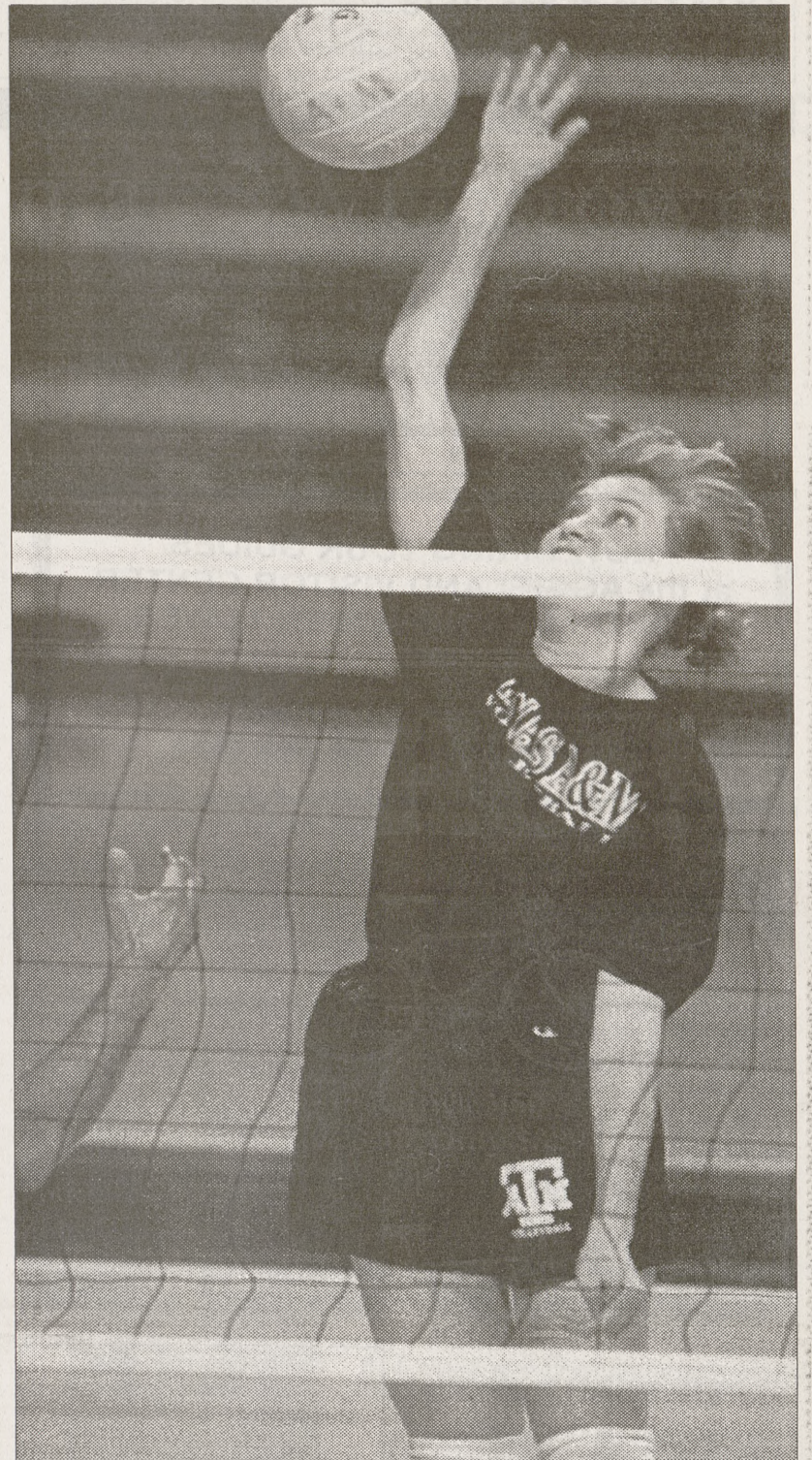
"I realize everyone has set high expectations for me this fall, and it's going to be a challenge to meet them," Smedsrud said.

"I've been playing volleyball since the eighth grade, so I know how much effort it takes to improve and step up to a higher level as a player," Smedsrud said. That's not something that scares me."

Now that Smedsrud's first year is over, Corbelli said her offensive star must step up her game for several reasons.

"Sophomore year is difficult," Corbelli said. "The newness of college has worn off, and expectations are higher from athletic and academic standpoints."

"Other teams might scout her so much that they'll know a lot of her shots. She's going to have to raise her level."



Sophomore outside hitter Kristie Smedsrud prepares to spike the ball back over the net while preparing for the Lady Aggies' season opener.

Sykora promises athletic attack

Head coach Laurie Corbelli calls the freshman the best athlete she has ever recruited.

By Lisa Nance
THE BATTALION

Outside the gym, A&M freshman outside hitter Stacy Sykora comes across as timid and a little embarrassed to be talking about herself. But get her on the volleyball court, and she is anything but shy.

Sykora, an outside hitter from Burleson has one of the quickest arm swings in the nation and is expected to make an immediate impact for the Lady Aggies while competing for a starting position. Sykora says that she is just happy to be a part of the team.

"Starting to me is nothing," Sykora said. "It's a team thing. If the team wins, I'm still part of the team even if I'm not out there playing. If I cheer from the bench, I still feel like I'm part of it."

A&M Head Coach Laurie Corbelli said Sykora is the most talented athlete she has recruited in her coaching career.

"Physically, she is very versatile and has so many tools," Corbelli said. "I've recruited and coached some fantastic athletes, but none as athletic as her. She has the build of

a solid athlete and she has the mind of an athlete. She's really driven to be the best."

With a 30-inch standing vertical leap, Sykora is able to play high above the net and

left side, but could also work out of the middle or hit from the back row because of her explosive jump to the ball.

Sykora comes to A&M straight out of high school where she was a three-year letter winner. She led her team to a 61-7 record and two consecutive district titles.

She said she is working hard at making the transition from volleyball at the high school level to the collegiate level.

"It's a big transition but it's mostly in the intensity and in the form of the game," she said. "I thought I knew most of the stuff about hitting and passing. I never thought that I would learn so much when I came here. I've learned 100 percent more just in technical stuff."

Corbelli agrees that Sykora has done well in handling the change from high school to college volleyball.

"She has all the skills of the game," Corbelli said. "She has good attack skills. All the way around, she's very prepared for the game."

Aggies fans will have their first opportunity to see the high-flying freshman in action on Friday when this year's team faces a squad of A&M alumni in an exhibition. The match will be held at G. Rollie Coliseum at 7 p.m.



Tim Moog, THE BATTALION

Freshman outside hitter Stacy Sykora grimaces while digging the ball during a recent A&M volleyball practice.

to hit over the opposing team's block. She possesses a powerful jump serve that allows her opponents little time to see where the ball is going.

Sykora is expected to play mostly on the

'Captain Suzy' prepares for final run at SWC crown

Now a three-year veteran, Wenthe wants a SWC championship.

By Tom Day
THE BATTALION

When Lady Aggie volleyball setter Suzy Wenthe sleeps at night, one constant image dominates her dreams — Earning a nice, gold Southwest Conference champi-

onship ring.

Of course, Wenthe envisions this scenario wide awake and on the court, as well. For three seasons, the senior setter has led the team in work ethic while trying to lead the Aggies to SWC glory.

Based on the past three years, the choice was an easy one when it came time for the team to elect a captain.

"Suzy is their leader," A&M head coach Laurie Corbelli said. "The players elected her captain and given the time she has put

into this program already, she is probably the most ready to win."

"I'm aiming to keep the team morale up," Wenthe said. "Being captain, you can't just worry about yourself."

Entering her final year for the Lady Aggies, Wenthe has proved that hard work pays off. As a freshman in 1992, she earned SWC Newcomer of the Year honors and followed that up the following season with all-SWC second team and A&M MVP accolades.

Last season, Wenthe broke the A&M career assist record with 4,130 and also led the conference with a 12.63 assist average in SWC matches. The Aggie captain was named second-team all-South Region and first-team all-SWC for her efforts.

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After accomplishing so much, Wenthe won't let fan and media expectations for this season pressure her.

"I don't worry about what people are expecting," Wenthe said. "I just take each game individually and run our plays the way I'm asked to."

Being the Lady Aggies' setter for so long, Wenthe is well-practiced in handling responsibilities. That

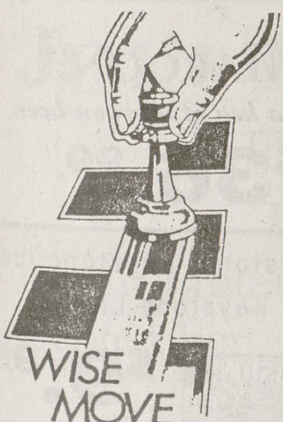
experience has come in handy since Wenthe gave birth to her daughter, Taylor Renee Johnson, last May. The new mother took off from school during the spring to focus on her newborn and staying in shape.

"It was best for me to take the semester off," Wenthe said. "I needed to concentrate on keeping my body in shape and grouping my thoughts together."

"I want to come back to prove to

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