

Battalion

## Stepping out of the shadows

### Senior middle blocker Lauri Leahy makes most of starting role for Texas A&M Volleyball Team

BY JASON LINCOLN  
The Battalion

On occasion, great athletes arise where you expect them least. A player can be lurking on the backburner until their chance comes, and they have to be more than their own best dreams. Whether it be due to size, experience, strength or number of factors, some players can be miscalculated.

Lauri "Lucy" Leahy is one such player. The senior for the Texas A&M Volleyball Team was merely backup until her chance came. When it did, she took the opportunity to show just what she could do.

Leahy now holds the starting middle blocker position, where she leads the team with a passive, greedy, love for volleyball and an intense desire to win.

"Lucy has a quiet intensity that at its peak when she realizes she has more to prove," A&M volleyball coach Laurie Corbelli said. That style of play makes Leahy a dangerous variable for the Aggies. She does not fit the typical profile of a strong middle blocker, yet she is a consistent hitter that can deliver the ball accurately and effectively.

However, it took several years for Leahy's role on the team to become clear.

That time came halfway through the 1998 season, when Heather McWhirter was injured and Leahy moved into the starting spot in the beginning of November.

She responded during her first career start against Texas Tech with 11 kills, 22 attacks, 15 digs and three solo blocks. The match also marked her first double-double out of several that would follow in coming games.

"I was really discouraged before that game," Leahy said. "Then [McWhirter was injured] and it jumped out at me that this was my chance. The team was relying on me to fill the hole so I did what was needed."

After the win over Texas Tech, Leahy kept the starting position for the Aggies' 10 remaining matches. She finished the season with a .364 hitting efficiency, which led the team and was second in the Big 12 Conference.

She also broke A&M's four-game match record and tied the total blocks record in the first round of the NCAA tournament in which she put up 12 block assists in the Aggie win. In the same match, she racked up 16 kills and a .556 hitting efficiency.

"I was confident that she would do a very solid job," Corbelli said. "I didn't know that she would be leading the conference in hitting position and be blocking so effectively."

Leahy never relinquished her starting position and has developed into a team leader and one of the conference's strongest middle blockers.

"When we needed her last year, she came in and did an excellent job and proved to everyone that she could be a starter, and that has been really impor-

tant to our team," senior teammate Amber Woolsey said. "She's probably one of the most consistent players on the court now."

Times were not always filled with success on the court for the Leahy. She began her road to success as a freshman walk-on who saw very little playing time in her first two and a half seasons.

"What impressed me most about Lucy when she came into our gym is that she's very athletic and she always has a grin on her face," Corbelli said. "It always came off to me that she was enjoying what she did. That all-around ability, competitive spirit and the joy of the game was so visible to me, and I needed a player like that."

"I knew that with training she could contribute to the team, but I had no idea she would become such a dominant middle hitter and middle blocker."

The training was used to develop a thorough understanding of the offense, polish her skills and adjust her to Aggie volleyball. "It's not easy to sit the bench," Leahy said about her early years. "It's hard to put in all the time and not see any court time. There's just something there that keeps you going, telling you someday you'll get your chance to prove yourself."

In addition to all the challenges that Leahy has faced playing and succeeding in collegiate volleyball, she has faced rigorous academic challenges.

SEE LEAHY ON PAGE 12.



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Senior Lauri Leahy has gone from being a freshman walk-on to an integral part of the volleyball team.

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