

Proving her point

Senior outside hitter Celia Howes gets chance to showcase talents for A&M Volleyball Team

BY JASON LINCOLN
The Battalion

When Celia Howes first picked up a volleyball in her high school, she was hardly a threat — much less a standout player. In fact, her friends and family wondered if volleyball was even the sport for her.

But the teen-ager was determined to improve and went so far as to bet her loved ones she would go on to play collegiate volleyball. It was seemingly an outlandish bet for a young girl who could barely get the ball over the net — at least it may have appeared that way to those unfamiliar with Howes' competitive drive.

Nine years later, the senior outside hitter for the Texas A&M Volleyball Team looks back on those early days and laughs.

"When I started out in junior high I was terrible. I looked at volleyball," Howes said. "But I just knew I wanted to play competitive college volleyball. I set that goal and I think that motivated me to improve."

Howes' development into a collegiate-level player did not translate into immediate stardom with Aggie volleyball. That was not one of her goals, and she said she is always very goal-oriented. Instead, she was looking to make the right contributions, whatever necessary, to help A&M win.

"I want to be characterized as a stable force out there," she said. "Somebody my teammates can count on every game. I don't know if I'm quite there yet. I have some steps to go, but that's what I want to do for this team."

As a young collegiate player, Howes was overshadowed by some of Texas A&M's resident powerhouses. Players such as All-American Stacy Sykora and Steve Corbelli dominated the Aggie court and especially Howes' position, but they provided her with opportunities for the up-and-coming player to get match experience.

But with a goal in front of her, Howes was determined to keep working to improve, and by last season she had found her role in the Aggie game plan.

"The past few years I've been a bench player," Howes said. "I was playing behind my great friends Kristie Smedsrud and Stacy Sykora, who were very inspirational and motivational. They were awesome outside hitters that I was fortunate enough to learn from."

"It's fun this year because I'm finally getting a chance to contribute my own play to the game."

That contribution has been quite large this season. Howes plays at left-side outside hitter, where she functions in large offensive and defensive roles necessary to put the ball away. She is also one of the Aggies' primary passers that helps determine and set up A&M's initial offensive attack.

"It's fun, you're the terminator," Howes said. "It's an exciting role. You're all over the court, you get to do tons of different things, you're not very limited and you have to be good at every single aspect of the game. That's why I enjoy it so much."

The multiple roles of the position requires a versatility that Howes has spent many years developing.

"She plays a tough position, especially in the Big 12," A&M volleyball coach Laurie Corbelli said. "Sometimes as an outside hitter, it's you against the world. It's you against the entire squad on the other side, trying to find a way to terminate. That's the mentality she's growing into."

With all the different roles of the outside hitter, it is often hard to recognize a player's specialty. However, on the court it is obvious that nothing drives Howes more than big defensive plays.

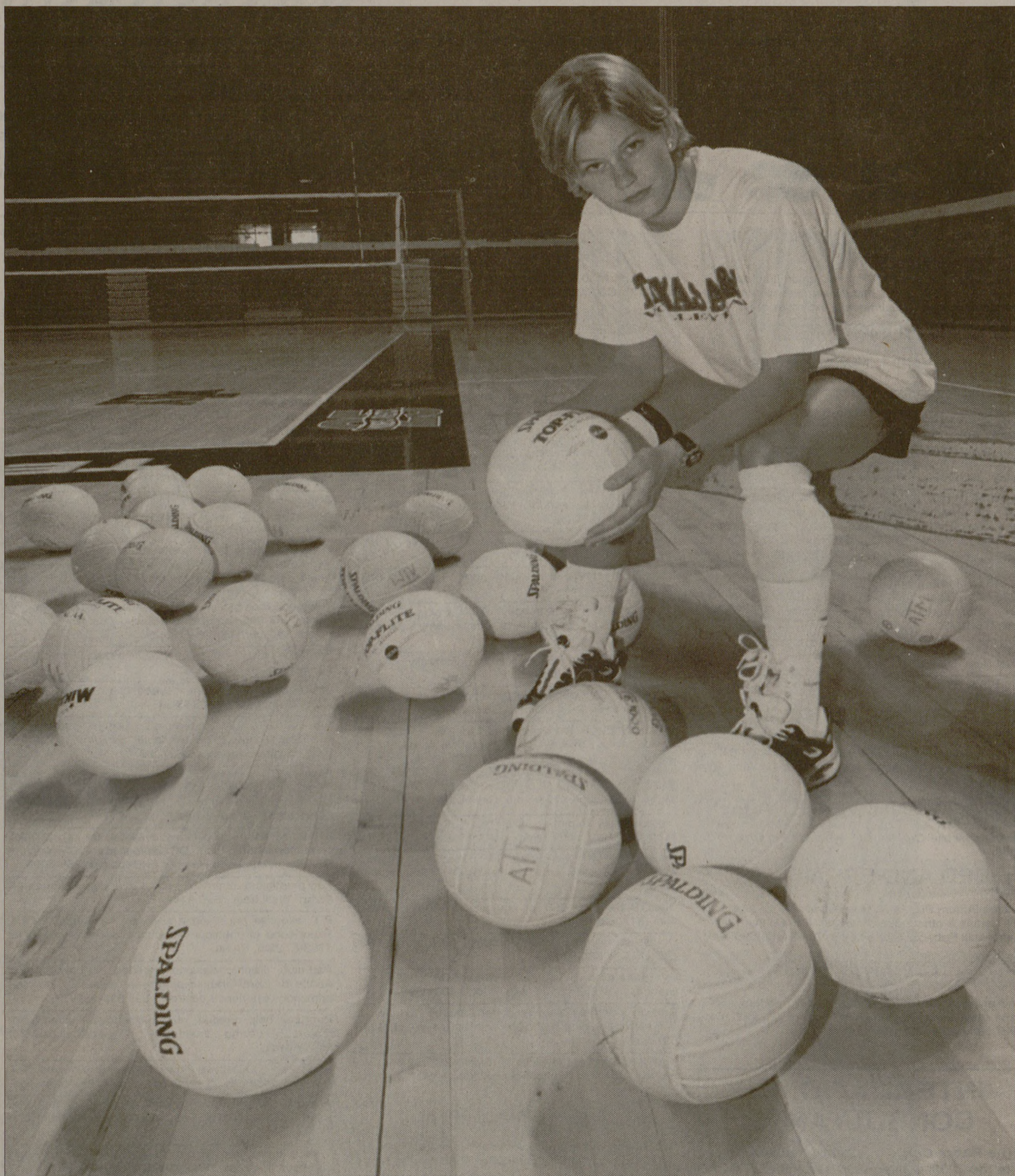
"I love defense," she said. "It's really exciting because it's something that fires up the crowd, fires up your teammates and fires up yourself. A great dig can just change the attitude of a game. It's kind of like stealing the other team's glory."

In addition to leading the team defensively with a 3.11 digs per game average, Howes leads the serving statistics for A&M and is second in kills with 2.74 kills per game average.

But dominant numbers and performance on the court are only one aspect of Howes' game.

Corbelli said the leadership the senior provides to the team is just as vital.

"Celia likes to philosophize on the court," Corbelli said. "She is the team's deep thinker — analyzing the situations from the team perspective, how everybody's thinking, how everybody's feeling, the feel we want on the court, the general chemistry. One of the things she's known for on the court is that she likes to



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Senior outside hitter **Celia Howes** became a regular starter for the A&M Volleyball Team this year. Howes played behind former All-Americans Kristie Smedsrud and Stacy Sykora her first three years on the team.

SEE HOWES ON PAGE 8.

Stupid things to say at a cool party #16

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