

Familiar Face, New Place

Commentary by Stephen Batcher

Imagine playing for the Boston Red Sox, and then in the off season signing on with the New York Yankees, the Sox's biggest rival in baseball. What about transferring from Michigan to Ohio State in between football seasons? That return trip to Michigan would be killer. Well, in the realm of Division II volleyball that would be like transferring here from Duluth. That is exactly what Whitney Meierotto did this season.

After playing two seasons for the Bulldogs, one in which she dominated us in the regional final, she packed her bags and headed south to St. Paul. One might wonder why? Why would she leave a team that made it to the national final four last year and was returning the NCAA division II player of the year along with most of her teammates? Why would she leave all of that for a team who lost in the sweet sixteen and lost two all-Americans and five senior starters last season?

For starters, Meierotto said that she was "upset with some of the decisions made by her coach." Volleyball had become more of a job, and not an enjoyable job. "Volleyball has always been fun and something I enjoyed; it got to the point that it wasn't fun anymore,"



Left: Meierotto spikes the ball in the game against Northern Michigan.
Photos courtesy of www.csp.edu/athletics

said Meierotto. Out of high school, Meierotto really only looked at UMD for school, mainly because her sister was already there. After quitting at UMD, she only looked at Concordia and chose to transfer here soon after. She said she really enjoyed the women and the coaches. Her family is also long time friends with assistant coach George Padjen, and Meierotto said that was a factor in her coming here. She went on to add that playing here and going to school here are already a complete 180 degree turnaround compared to Duluth.

When asked what she thought of the fans here, she said that the fans really get into it, and that it is definitely different being on the home team here instead of being the away team. She said she used to laugh at some of our cheers while playing at Duluth, and now she laughs because she knows what its like to be the other girl. Meierotto also said that UMD has a Hawaiian night and the fans understand that Concordia is the team to beat when the Bears visit Duluth as well, so the fans get pretty crazy for the rivalry there as well.

As for goals for this season Meierotto said that she wants to learn and grow from every game. When asked what it meant to be one of the older women on the team and whether she felt she needed to step up and help the young freshmen, she explained to me how being to the final four helped her grow up fast. Now she knows it's her responsibility to help the newcomers grow up, and she can give them knowledge to help them grow as players. She understands that there are big shoes to be filled by her teammates this year, and she knows that it will tough to replace them. However, she said that she doesn't feel pressure to outperform the past players and doesn't feel like it is a burden to replace anyone. "The ultimate goal is to "win a national championship."

Volleyball Preview:

Restocking the Shelves, Room for Possibilities

Commentary by Stephen Batcher

Exit stage right: Jessica Lucia, Megan Graham, Ashley Olson, Monica McNamara, and Kelsey Kyro. Enter stage left: Whitney Meierotto, Emily Palkert, Sadie Kessler, Mary Slinger, and Krista Erikson. The Golden Bears lost a pair of All-Americans and a quartet of All-Conference performers last season. Big problem, right? Wrong! So far this year the Bears seem to have revamped pretty well. As of September 20th, the Bears are 13-1.

Usually it is tough when a team loses so many seniors, but Coach Brady Starkey has done a fine job this season restocking the shelves. Maybe the coaches for the Vikings should give Brady a call for some help in the future. Coming off the heartbreaking loss to Minnesota-Duluth last season to end the Bears national title hopes, the Bears will look to defend their conference crown again this year. They lost most their team, but the Bears have barely lost a step, coming right out and beating the number seven team in the nation in a three game sweep earlier this month. The latest poll has the Bears at number four with some tough games ahead.

Whitney Meierotto is a junior transfer from UMD and has made an immediate impact leading the team in kills. Whitney was instrumental in helping UMD end the Bears season last year, but the Bears hope she will help the team defeat the Bulldogs this year. Meierotto has the potential to fill in the role of Jessica Lucia. She hasn't hit as well as Lucia did in her illustrious career here yet, but she can sure dig like her and has a killer serve. Meierotto will also be able to help Maggie McNamara, Mary Slinger and Maria Steinhausen lead an inexperienced team as the season progresses.



Clockwise from top left: Emily Palkert, Sadie Kessler, Krista Erikson, Mary Slinger
Photos courtesy of www.csp.edu/athletics

Emily Palkert, a freshman from Excelsior, MN, seems to have replaced the role of Kelsey Kyro in the line-up, and she has made a huge impact so far this season. She is second on the team in kills and has proved to be huge at the net blocking as well. Palkert, along with Maria Steinhausen, has helped the Bears stifle the opponents, holding them to a .067 hitting percentage.

Sadie Kessler, a sophomore from Albertville, MN, has also fit in nicely for the Bears, filling the shoes of Ashley Olson. Mary Slinger, a sophomore from Faribault, MN, will be taking over for Megan Graham. Slinger played in every game last year but she is new to the libero position this season. This will mean more playing time for the sophomore. Slinger has showed she already has the skills to dig like Graham joining the 30 Dig Club in the first weekend of the season. Krista Erikson, a freshman outside hitter from Andover, MN, has also stepped up for the Bears this season. She has done more digging than hitting, but her impact as a defensive specialist has been just as big.

The new starters, mixed with the four returnees, look to give Concordia fans another successful season. They have already proven they can beat a good team here at home, but it is yet to be seen how they will do on the road against tough opponents. The leadership from the returnees will be a question mark for the Bears this season, but if the returnees step up to their potential, it could be another very successful year for our Bears. A possible National Championship is not out of the realm of possibilities, but with such a young team things will need to come together fast.