



Daniel Bott/Collegian

Trio of seniors leaves behind successful legacy

By Jocelyn Syrstad
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After three national titles and four Big Ten championships in four years, the Penn State women's volleyball team will graduate what coach Russ Rose refers to as one of the most storied classes in Penn State history.

With the Nittany Lions recording a 142-5 record throughout the past four years, Rose said he remembered reading that seniors Alisha Glass and Megan Hodge have had the best four-year collegiate record of any class in the history of women's volleyball.

The impact from those two and fellow senior Kelsey Ream, who transferred after her freshman

year, went beyond success on the court — something noted by players and coaches who expressed the seniors' monumental importance to the program.

"I came in with those girls, so it's going to be hard for me to see them leave," redshirt junior Blair Brown said. "Besides from the obvious physical attributes they brought to the table, I think they were great leaders, and it's going to be very, very hard for us to see them leave."

Looking at numbers, it is apparent how much both Glass and Hodge contributed to the team.

Hodge, an outside hitter, finished her collegiate career with 2,142 kills, second all-time at Penn State. She also had a .322 hitting

percentage. Glass, a setter, finished with 5,799 assists, fourth all-time for Penn State, and blocked 454 balls.

Ream had anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) surgery during the offseason and spent most of her senior season on the bench. However, teammates said she still contributed to the team by bringing a positive energy and enthusiasm to the court.

"The senior class is great in every aspect that you look at them," junior libero Alyssa D'Errico said. "Each of them brings something different to the team skill-wise, personality-wise. It's gonna be very, very tough replacing them on and off the court."

Brown said they all brought a

high level of intensity to both practice and matches, which will be hard to replace.

"We're going to have some huge holes in our lineup," Rose said. "As I said the year before, you don't replace Roberta Holehouse, Christa Harmotto and Nicole Fawcett by putting new players in there because you can never replace what people feel, and the effort they put in and how important it was to them. The same holds true for these girls."

With eight incoming freshmen joining the Penn State team next season, the Lions are going to see many changes on the court. The graduating seniors will also have adjustments to make, as both Glass and Hodge will continue

their volleyball careers with the U.S. National team.

As the seniors finish their final semester at Penn State and reflect on their time on the team, it's still hard for them to believe it is over.

"It's weird to think that we're done, but it's great to look back and see what we've accomplished over the years," Glass said. "It's pretty incredible. I'm really happy I was at Penn State. I'm really happy that I was with the girls that I was and the opportunities we created and got to be a part of. I'm going to look back and always be happy with my time at Penn State."

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A VIEW FROM THEIR EYES PSU'S PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE WEIGH IN



NICOLE FAWCETT

Although she graduated after last season, Fawcett still had interest in the 2009 championship match. So much so, that she stayed awake after 4 a.m. to watch the match live on the Internet.

The seven-hour time difference between Tampa and Kaliningrad, Russia, where Fawcett is currently playing club ball, did not deter the former Nittany Lion from watching and savoring every second of her former teammates' play.

"I was really nervous for the girls because I know how difficult it is to get the momentum going from losing the first

two," Fawcett wrote in an e-mail.

The back-and-forth nature of the match reminded Fawcett of the national semifinal match during her senior season when Penn State went to five sets before defeating Nebraska and gave her an idea of what it must have been like for fans during that match.

"Right after the match, [former teammate] Christa [Harmotto] and I talked, and we were both crying and laughing because we now understood what we put our fans through and we are sorry," Fawcett wrote.



ALYSSA D'ERRICO

The junior libero and her Nittany Lion teammates found themselves in an unfamiliar position after the second set of the title match.

They were one set away from the season being over.

They were one set away from going home without a national championship for the first time in three years.

"We knew that we put ourselves in that situation," D'Errico said. "We knew that it was in our power to kinda turn it around and regain control of the match."

Behind key digs from D'Errico and Cathy Quilico, the Lions did regain control of the match in the third and fourth sets, forcing a fifth and deciding set.

"We just looked into each other's eyes starting in the third game and made sure that we all knew that we were on the same page, and we were all fighting for the same thing," the libero said.

D'Errico finished with 22 digs as the Lions bounced back from the two-set deficit.



KATIE SLAY

Slay will not be an official member of the Penn State women's volleyball team until next year, but the high school senior from Raleigh, N.C., already has a pretty good idea of what is in store for her.

The 6-foot-6 middle blocker was one of six Penn State recruits who traveled to Tampa for the Under Armour All-America game and got to watch the championship match from inside the St. Pete Times Forum.

"It was disheartening that we were down, but I had faith in my future teammates,"

Slay said. "After the third set you could just see that [Penn State] was more motivated to come back."

Apart from the excitement of the match, Slay said the final was a learning experience for her as she prepares for her first season of collegiate volleyball.

"I try to watch the middles because that's the position I'll be coming into," she said. "Just the speed of the game, and you have to be in great physical shape to last five sets and those intense rallies."



Cassavell

ROAD TO GLORY

Daily Collegian women's volleyball writer Andrew J. Cassavell ranks the top-5 matches this season.

5. PSU 3, Illinois 0:

Sept. 26 at Champaign

In what coach Russ Rose called the best game his team played all regular season, the Nittany Lions swept the Illini in their first week-end of conference play. The match doubled as the emergence of Alyssa D'Errico and Cathy Quilico as one of the nation's best combinations of back-line passers.

Quote from the match:
"We were on tonight, and we played really well. This was the best match we've played to date, and it was against the best competition we've had to date."
— Outside hitter Darcy Dorton

4. PSU 3, Minnesota 0:

Oct. 11 at Minneapolis

All the questions about the Lions' dominance were answered on that October Sunday as they went into Minnesota and knocked off the then-No. 5 Gophers with ease. Megan Hodge recorded 21 kills on the afternoon, and the Lions out-hit the Gophers, 328 to 209. Heading into the match, Penn State had suffered two dropped sets in its previous three contests — its first dropped regular season sets in 141 overall.

Quote from the match:
"We went into the third set with a different mentality and a different energy. ... We didn't allow them to run what they wanted to run and we took their offense away."
— Middle blocker Blair Brown

3. PSU 3, Hawaii 1:

Dec. 17 at Tampa

After losing the first set to the Rainbow Wahine, the Lions responded by shutting down Hawaii's All-American Kanani Danielson. Danielson — a .327 hitter on the season — was held to just a .060 clip as the Lions advanced to the title match. Rose, who earned his 1000th career victory with the win, used 6-foot-5 Blair Brown and 6-foot-3 Fatima Balza on Danielson, and the result was a

two-kill block for Penn State.

Quote from the match:
"We out-blocked them 15-0. That's the answer to why the match went the way it went. Our defense, I think, is underrated."
— Head coach Russ Rose

2. PSU 3, Michigan 2:

Oct. 16 at Ann Arbor

For the first time since last season's national semifinal, Penn State was pushed to a full five sets. The Lions responded strongly after falling behind two sets to one with a 25-21 fourth-set win and a 15-12 fifth-set clincher. Though Rose wasn't happy with the Lions' performance, the match was the first real obstacle for a relatively untested team. Hodge recorded 25 kills and Arnie Wilson improved her NCAA-leading hitting percentage with a match-high .696 clip.

Quote from the match:
"I think it's definitely a confidence booster to know that we can work our way out of [a deficit]. If it happens again, we've been there, and we've come through when it mattered."
— Libero Alyssa D'Errico

1. PSU 3, Texas 2:

Dec. 19 at Tampa

The Lions' come-from-behind, 3-2 thriller ranks among the greatest matches in collegiate volleyball history. Despite an epic performance from Texas' Destinee Hooker, who was named the tournament's Most Outstanding Player, the Lions rode great back-row performances from D'Errico and Quilico to their third-straight title.

Quote from the match:
"We were able to find a way to win and end with a win. It makes you feel a lot better when you get done because there are no more unanswered questions or what-ifs or 'Maybe if we had just done this.' But we did that. We gave it our all, and we came out with a win, and you can't ask for anything more than that."
— Setter Alisha Glass