

Junior Del Valle changes style

By Eric Book
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Dennis Del Valle doesn't dive, jump, sprint or fly as much as he used to.

The junior libero on the No. 5 Penn State men's volleyball team came to Penn State three years ago from Puerto Rico with lots of energy and the unbelievable ability to get to balls destined for the ground.

MEN'S VOLLEYBALL

Yet the Penn State coaching staff noticed Del Valle missing on some routine plays because he would guess where the ball was going to try to make a great play. First-year assistant coach Jay Hosack came in and tweaked Del Valle's style.

"The thing I first saw when I got here was that he had a lot of emotion," Hosack said. "He moved a lot. He saw things that he thought were gonna happen, and he would dance around a little bit on defense."

Hosack taught Del Valle to stay on the ground and react to what happens, not what he thinks is going to happen.

"He would make spectacular plays," he said. "But the good plays, which we're trying to get constantly, he was missing. We watched video, and we were watching somebody attack a ball. Because he was up in the air and waiting to come down and make a move, the ball had traveled half the distance already. He was training himself to be as fast as he had to be."

At first, Hosack's suggestions didn't make an impact on Del Valle because he didn't know Hosack's background and experience.

Hosack needed an "assist" from Penn State women's volleyball coach Russ Rose to get through to Del Valle.

During the men's team's preseason, Rose asked Del Valle how things were going with the new assistant coach.

Del Valle said Hosack was criticizing him all the time.

Rose told Del Valle to listen to Hosack because he had a strong opinion that Hosack could really help Del Valle out.

"At first, Hosack needed to get Del Valle's attention was credibility from someone Del Valle respects, and respect is all Del Valle has for Rose.

"If you compare our coach with Coach Rose, it's so different the type of coaching they have," Del Valle said. "Coach Rose will make you feel as bad as possible so you can fix what you have to fix. I really love the way he does the way he talks during practice, after practice and before practice. I just like listening to him because he knows what he's saying."

Now, Del Valle knows Hosack "knows what he's saying," and the libero has bought into Hosack's style and is starting to make big strides.

Del Valle said he's never gotten much feedback from coaches on what to improve on because he's always been pointed. Hosack brings in a lot of experience coaching liberos, and Del Valle is eager to learn.

When Hosack came to the staff, he added a dimension that head coach Mark Pavlik and assistant Colin McMillan don't. It isn't Pavlik's coaching style to be overbearing on players during practice, but Hosack doesn't shy away from pointing out if a player isn't performing up to standards.

"In the past I would mention certain things and he would get a little frustrated," Hosack said. "Now it's the opposite. If he doesn't make the good play or doesn't do a pass right he's immediately going, 'Dangit, I know what I gotta do,' and he changes it."

What the coaching staff is looking for from Del Valle is summed up simply by Pavlik. He says he wants Del Valle to find the right spot, and let the ball hit him.

An analogy Pavlik draws is for Del Valle to play libero like Martin Brodeur plays goalie. He said when watching Brodeur play, he doesn't move much at all. He finds his spot and lets the puck hit him.

Last Saturday against Springfield, Del Valle matched a career-high with 18 digs in what Pavlik called one of the best matches of his career.

Hosack said that Del Valle stayed steady against the Pride.

"He kept us in points," Hosack said. "There were a couple of plays that were directly a result of him working hard to keep us in those points. He's just in the right spots and he's doing the right things. That's where unfortunately some people overlook it because the average crowd doesn't necessarily know what a really good dig is. They react to the diving, behind the head save."

Del Valle said it has been a tough transition from his old style of play, but he likes where he's at now.

"I used to run all over the court like crazy trying to get digs and stuff," Del Valle said. "When Jay came here he told me to stay in your spot and where you're supposed to be, and those balls are gonna come right to you. For me, it was hard to believe sometimes."

Del Valle said the new style has its ups and downs. There are some balls that he feels he could get to in the past that he can't dig. But, he said, getting all of the easier balls definitely makes up for the few he can't get anymore.

Last Tuesday against Juniata, only one of Del Valle's team-high 10 digs had him leave the ground. On nine of them, he found his spot and let the ball hit him. For the other dig he still had enough time to react to make the more challenging play.

Still, there was one routine play that Del Valle would like to have back.

It came in the third set, with the match all but wrapped up by the Lions and Del Valle playing with reserve players. He hit a ball softly over the net, which appeared on its way to just being a free ball for Juniata to set up its offense.

The Eagles never hit that free ball as it soared all the way past the end line for an Eagle point.

Del Valle put his blue jersey over his head in embarrass-



Amanda August/Collegian

Penn State junior libero Dennis Del Valle gets ready to receive the ball during a practice earlier this season.

ment as teammate Thomas Pereira came over to jokingly console him with a hug.

All jokes and mistakes aside, the Lions are pleased with Del Valle's revised game.

"My expectation of Dennis is not to be the load carrier because that's not his position, but he can keep us in system," Hosack said. "He can keep us under control. He has that ability to turn chaotic plays into system plays. I think from a coach's perspective that's all you can ask."

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Injured gymnasts hope rest helps them get better

By Jim Mauro
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Matt Albrecht huddled his teammates together before the first event, shouted, "We are!" and waited for the squad's response.

All Albrecht and a few of his older teammates could do Sunday was motivate and cheer on their younger teammates.

MEN'S GYMNASTICS

Injuries kept seniors Allen Harris and Neam Shaham, and juniors Albrecht and Warren Yang out of the lineup for the No. 5 Penn State men's gymnastics team's win over No. 14 William & Mary.

Harris is still recovering from a torn left biceps. He competed for the first time this season on Jan. 24 against No. 1 Michigan but was left off the roster for last week's meet against the Tribe.

Shaham also competed against the Wolverines but sprained his thumb during one of his routines. Yang has yet to compete for the Nittany Lions this season.

Albrecht suffered a concussion during warmups at the West Point Open when he missed on high bar and hit his head on the padding below. However, he still competed in

the meet, winning the individual title on parallel bars.

"At first, it didn't feel like anything," Albrecht said. "Then, the next couple days, the symptoms increased, and that's when I started to take the time off."

All his symptoms have cleared up, and he started doing basics again last week, Albrecht said.

Because it is mandatory for every team in the NCAA to have a day free of gymnastics activities during the week, Penn State coach Randy Jepson gave his team off Monday. He is uncertain how the injured gymnasts are progressing because he has yet to see them this week.

But the gymnasts are optimistic, and the two weeks of rest could be just what they need to get back in action. The Lions' next meet is not until Feb. 20.

"That's going to be good to get healthy, get prepared and back in shape and get all those little things ready and prepared," Shaham said.

However, getting in shape in practice and being in meet shape are two totally different things.

Albrecht knows it will not be easy, but he is confident the early season training will help the injured Lions overcome the time they missed.

"Randy prepared us really well in the preseason," Albrecht said. "I think it will be hard the first couple days

because my body will be sore, but we had a good base coming into the season. So I don't think it'll be too hard once I get back in the swing of things."

And the Lions are going to need their experienced gymnasts to be ready in the upcoming weeks as they face stiff competition. Two talented Big Ten squads — No. 2 Illinois and No. 6 Ohio State — await Penn State in its next two meets.

Practice this week will both help the gymnasts heal and improve their routines so they are ready to compete in two weeks.

"This week we are not going to do a lot of volume, which will be easier on their bodies," Jepson said. "We're trying to define and make some upraises in some places."

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Hindered Brockway adjusts to new role

By Jake Kaplan
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Alexandra Brockway is not accustomed to focusing solely on one event.

But this season, she has been forced to do just that.

Brockway, who competed on the vault, uneven bars and the balance beam in every meet last season for the Penn State women's gymnastics team, has been limited to just the uneven bars this season because of a lingering ankle injury.

WOMEN'S GYMNASTICS

"It's upsetting because I've trained every event for the last three years," Brockway said. "Then to let it be my senior year and just have that kind of news, just kind of shatter the rest of the opportunities."

The senior sprained her ankle in late November and a recent MRI showed some significant damage to the ankle, Penn State coach Steve Shephard said. Shephard and the team doctors agreed Brockway should not risk further injury by doing any unnecessary pounding on the ankle. Brockway is also limited in her practice repetitions on bars.

Despite the lessened role, Brockway has been staying positive and realizes she will be able to put all of her focus on bars, the event she was a first-team All-American on last year. The senior from Macungie has already started working on some new skills for the event. In four meets this season, Brockway has averaged a 9.719.

"When one door closes, another opens," she said. "I try to tell myself that."

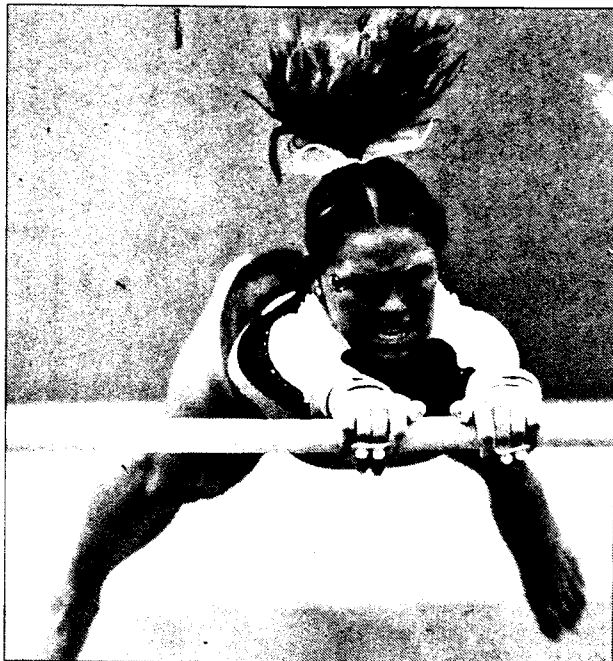
Shephard has been impressed with how Brockway has handled the situation. Immediately following the injury, the team thought the senior would recover and be able to perform on beam and maybe even vault. It was frustrating for Brockway when she realized she could no longer physically do those events, especially beam, on which she averaged a 9.735 as an anchor for the Nittany Lions last season.

"I think she's handled it very well and in a very mature way," Shephard said. "I mean, obviously she's disappointed, but at the same time she understands she wants to be able to have a normal life after gymnastics, and it's not worth it to jeopardize the future health of her ankle and take a chance at doing more."

Senior Casey Rohrbaugh, one of Brockway's closest friends on the team, said she tries to keep the situation in perspective for her teammate and keep her encouraged.

Rohrbaugh gave words of encouragement to Brockway right before Brockway began her bar routine during last Saturday's meet.

"I'm just like 'Al, I mean you're doing one [event]. You have to really focus on that one and make it the best you



Abby Drey/Collegian

Penn State senior Alexandra Brockway performs on the uneven bars at Rec Hall on Jan. 30.

"It's upsetting because I've trained every event for the last three years."

Alexandra Brockway
senior gymnast

can, since that's the only one you're doing," Rohrbaugh said she has been telling her teammate since the injury. "And she's doing good with it now, but I definitely have to keep her encouraged because she gets down on herself."

Senior co-captain Rosie Smith knows what it's like to be unable to compete because of an injury. Smith went down with a season-ending foot injury on Feb. 21 of last season and was forced to become a vocal leader. Though Brockway is only competing on one event, Smith thinks she can still help the team on the other three events.

"You can make a huge impact with your words, encouragement, motivation, stuff like that," Smith said. "I found that out last year when I couldn't do any routines. I was more of a verbal impact, so that's what I want her to understand. She can still make a great impact and better the team this year."

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