

Wolf un-frilled by success

By Emily Kaplan
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Ryan Wolf can't swing the ball with the same velocity as Will Price. He can't touch over 11 feet like Joe Sunder. He's not a returning All-American like Max Lipsitz.

MEN'S VOLLEYBALL

Heck, he's not even a starter.

But Wolf, a 6-foot-3 former walk-on, brings something to the Penn State men's volleyball team that none of its stars can — unmatched unflappability.

Wolf, a sophomore outside hitter, is a role player for the No. 8 Nittany Lions. He comes in to serve in certain rotations or plays just a few points to give the starters a breather. But no matter the situation, he's always the essence of calm, adding a much-needed balance to the 6-2 Lions.

"He's a great player who for some reason you don't really notice in a game," said Price, a senior captain. "But he's there making all the plays he needs to on a regular basis. There's not a lot of fluctuation between his best day and his worst day, which is awesome for us because we need that consistency."

Wolf's personality also has little fluctuation. Mostly all of Wolf's teammates call him easy-going and reserved, with Price even going so far as describing him "robotic-like."

"Wolfy's the kind of guy that I can go, 'Wolfy do this. Wolfy can you serve?' Wolfy do you know what we're doing?' and every single time he'll just say, 'Yeah. Yep. OK,'" coach Mark Pavlik said.

"He's such an intelligent kid, and he really just gets the game. He sees it and works hard to get better."

Shortly after the players enter Rec Hall's South Gym for practice every day, they begin stretching, talking or throwing around some balls. Not the lone Wolf. The York native — one of the only players on the team who doesn't room with a volleyball player — is usually in his own corner, facing away from the rest of the guys working on his swings against the wall.

It's that work ethic and patience that landed Wolf a spot on the Lions' roster. At Central York High School, Wolf was a multi-sport star, excelling as a wide receiver on the football team — he averaged 16 yards per catch on 35 grabs his senior season — and once had aspirations to play Division I basketball.

"But by my junior year I decided I loved volleyball, and I wanted to play that in college. But I had to make the adjustment," Wolf said in his soft monotone voice.

As a slightly undersized outside hitter, Wolf knew he'd have to put in extra effort. So he solicited the help of his school's assistant coach Todd Goodling, and for 18 months, the two spent countless hours in the gym working on technique. Because Wolf was involved with other sports, the duo would train in the mornings before Goodling had to go to his day job as an architect, or stay late — often until 11 p.m. — after home wrestling meets or basketball games.

"Seeing Ryan work that hard and put in that much dedication to improve as a passer and a hitter was the most remarkable thing



Check the men's volleyball blog Above the Net for a podcast on sophomore hitter Ryan Wolf.
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I've seen in my time involved with volleyball," Central York head coach Brad Livingston said. "He had a goal and pursued it. Then he got the opportunity to tryout for Penn State, and you see how that worked out. He totally deserves it because he's such a hard worker and such a nice guy."

Wolf's amicability has made an impression on his new team, too. Pavlik can't think of a single instance where he was ever mad at Wolf.

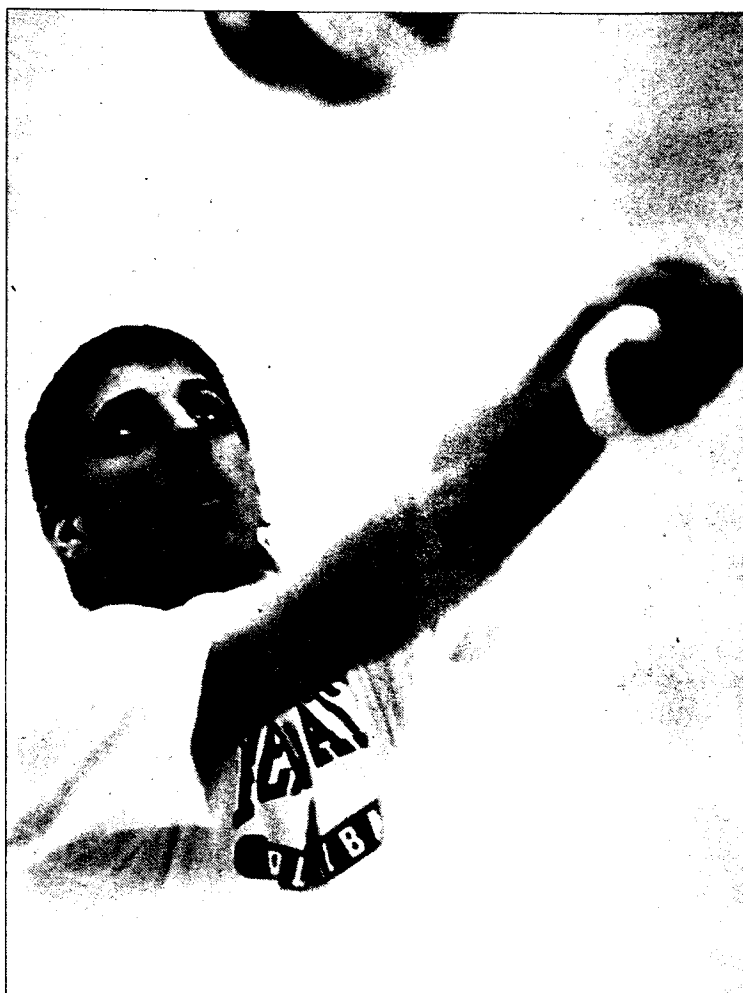
In fact, the only negative thing Pavlik could say about Wolf is that he's not a Pittsburgh Steelers fan.

"But he'll eventually come around," Pavlik said. "He's an intelligent guy."

Wolf's smarts on the court — Price said Wolf "knows the game just as well as anyone" — coincide with his success in the classroom. Wolf, who graduated in the top 5 percent of his class at Central York, is an accounting major and aspires to become a Certified Public Accountant.

Wolf's intelligence, athleticism and general good-natured demeanor combine to make him the total package — at least according to Pavlik.

"If there's a female out there looking for a boyfriend, and they don't snatch Wolfy up, they're missing something," the head coach said. "Here's a kid who's going to be successful. He works hard, he's so nice, etc. I'm glad he's in blue and white."



Asit Mishra/Colegian

Penn State sophomore outside hitter Ryan Wolf passes the ball at practice Feb. 2 at Rec Hall. A role player, Wolf's collective demeanor in practice and in matches makes up for his physical deficiencies.

And the Lions have benefited from having Wolf, who is the ultimate low-maintenance, high-output player.

Though he doesn't produce statistically like Penn State's heralded hitters — Wolf has appeared in 13 sets this season posting just three kills — it's his composure on the court and ability to stabilize the team in high-stake situations

that factor into the Lions' success. "Maybe his impact on this program won't be in the number of kills, blocks, or aces he will have," Pavlik said.

But his impact on this program can be felt years after he graduates, how he does things, how he conducts himself."

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Lipsitz needs to step up as leader

By Eric Book

CAPTAINS have a lot of responsibility on Mark Pavlik's team.

He gives each member of the Penn State men's volleyball team a two-page, extremely detailed document entitled "Captain Job Description," and the Lions vote on who they think will best lead the team.



MY OPINION

This year, the Lions elected seniors Max Lipsitz and Will Price and junior Jesse Wagner, but it doesn't look like anyone has claimed this team as his own.

Wagner does have the energetic personality, but the problem is that he doesn't get much court time behind All-

American libero Dennis Del Valle.

For this team to be successful, Price needs to focus on his volleyball. His statistical contributions are too vital for the Lions to have him learning how to lead a team.

So while the Lions have a wealth of talent and are capable of winning a national championship, Lipsitz needs to be the one who leads them there.

Lipsitz was a captain last season, and he had the opportunity to be the junior captain who led by example. He wasn't expected to claim the team, because it wasn't his team yet.

Now it is. Lipsitz admits he doesn't have the leadership style of worrying about his teammates during the match. He leads with his volleyball.

Pavlik agrees it's not necessarily Lipsitz's personality to be the kind of leader that takes responsibility for his teammates on the

court, but he says that doesn't mean he can't do it.

"I think it goes back to the sacrifice part," Pavlik said. "Maybe it's not part of someone's DNA to sit on the bench either. You keep reinforcing that there's an expectation that this team is theirs. They, of all people, cannot be indifferent when something is happening that isn't in the direction they know or want the program to go."

The DNA comment from Pavlik is in reference to the captains' duty to handle complaints about playing time. It's their job to preach team sacrifice, and Pavlik expects sacrifice from them, too.

It's pretty obvious this team will make it to the NCAA tournament,



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ment, but without leadership the Lions won't be as prepared as their competition in the Final Four. Those are the cards they've dealt with their ETVA schedule. The most-likely two teams from the MPSF that make the Final Four will be favored to play in the final.

Penn State has the ability to not make it an all-California final, as it showed just two years ago.

Lipsitz just needs to take the Lions there.

Lipsitz will be there with his kills and blocks. He brings those every night. But there's more he can do. Whatever it takes, Lipsitz needs to sacrifice and claim his team. He has the capability. He has the respect of his teammates. He has the experience. He has a team that could win a national championship and call him their leader.

Now he just needs to be one



Peter Tesonero/Colegian

Max Lipsitz (right) attacks the ball against Juniata Jan. 26 at Rec Hall.

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