

# Price switches positions to opposite hitter

By Eric Book  
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Will Price wants to do whatever it takes to help his team win a national championship — even change positions.

## MEN'S VOLLEYBALL

The senior co-captain for the Penn State men's volleyball team was an All-American at outside hitter last season, and if he wants to repeat the accolade, he'll have to produce at opposite hitter.

This weekend against Rutgers-Newark and Springfield, Price moved to the right side of the Nittany Lions' formation and

played opposite hitter in attempt to balance the offense.

"As a team, in men's volleyball you need a right-side attack," Penn State setter Edgardo Goas said.

"We definitely need a big time right attack. With Will there, I think we'll be in pretty good shape."

Playing on the right side isn't completely new for the seasoned veteran. He transferred to the Lions from George Mason as an opposite, and he trained at the position two seasons ago while sit-



Price

ting out because of transfer rules. In their first eight matches of this season, the Lions had an unbalanced offensive attack.

Price and Joe Sunder easily lead the team in kills with 169 and 146, respectively, but all of those kills were coming from the left side of the court.

Tom Comfort and Alan Mars, the two players who had started at opposite before Price took their place Friday, have combined for just 73 kills.

Defenses were able to key in on the left side of the Lions' attack and possibly limit Price and Sunder's hitting percentage.

In Penn State's Jan. 30 loss at Loyola-Chicago, Price and Sunder

were each held to a .220 hitting percentage. Despite Mars ripping a career-high 13 kills at opposite, he was set only 21 times compared to Price and Sunder on the left being set a combined 100 times.

With Price now opposite Sunder, the offense has added some balance. Sunder totaled 29 kills this weekend and Price totaled 30.

"It is a little bit more balanced, especially on paper," Price said. "If our coaching staff feels that's what we're going to do to not have a lopsided attack — we had this conversation at the beginning of the year — I'm down to do whatever."

Now, Goas and Price have to get

on the same page. Goas is used to setting both Price and Sunder on the left, and they both are huge jumpers for the Lions, requiring a much different style of set than Comfort and Mars.

Penn State head coach Mark Pavlik kept Goas and Price in for every set of the Lions' matches this weekend for the two to get comfortable with Price on the right.

"It's different. It takes some getting used to," Price said. "It is something Edgardo and I haven't really clicked on yet. If we do stick with it once he and I start clicking, things will be a lot smoother."

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## Divers

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others, every dive can count for points. The variety of different scoring systems can be frustrating, head diving coach Craig Brown said. He and his team never know what to expect going into meets and have to be prepared for any kind of format.

"If the other team has more than us, they might just fill those spots with their dives," Brown said. "We place wherever we place."

One thing the two can count on is facing more experienced divers.

"Nick and I are underclassmen, and we usually go up against juniors and seniors," Marchinski said. "Especially in home meets, teams will try to bring their best guys. But we hold our ground and always do our best."

Despite their lack of experience, the duo's skill set has progressed at an impressive rate, Brown said.

"They've really learned a lot of hard dives in a short amount of time," he said. "To learn them this quick is a tribute to their effort. Not a lot of people can walk into a college program and learn this fast."

## Starting fresh

Their strong efforts aside, the absence of a single upperclassman has proved to be difficult for the young team this season. The Lions are currently in a rebuilding year, Brown said, and are dealing with serious losses in personnel from last season. Brown still had a fairly short roster to work with last year with just three divers, McLain being one of them as a walk-on freshman.

But the other two, senior twin brothers and NCAA Zone A qualifiers Josh and Justin Bonner, had plenty of experience. Losing the Bonners and the senior leadership they brought with them to the program has been troublesome this season, but McLain has enjoyed the task of stepping into a leadership role.

"Me being a sophomore and Alex a freshman, there's only one way to go, and that's up," he said. "For the guys coming in the next couple years, it gives them someone to look up to."

In the past few years, Penn State has lost out on potential recruits to other programs and has dealt with funding issues, Brown said. But the Lions' numbers will definitely grow next year,

as Brown has already confirmed the signing of at least one diver. The team is also in contact with two more high school seniors, as well as a possible Division-I transfer, Brown said. The coach could not give the names of these recruits though he was pleased with the progress his program is making with recruiting.

"With the addition of two or three more teammates coming in, things are going to get a lot better," Marchinski said. "Going into next season, we're showing the other teams in the conference that we're improving."

But until those recruits arrive on campus next year, Marchinski and McLain will continue to carry the load.

## Utilizing the differences

Coming from different backgrounds of the sport, Marchinski and McLain bring two different styles of diving to the pool every day. Marchinski is fluid coming off the board and moves smoothly through the air, Brown said. McLain, on the other hand, is a bit snappier and crisper, tight with his aerials. McLain's gymnastics background has set him up to be stronger physically than his freshman counterpart.

"With his strength, he gets more height," Marchinski said. "But it's good that I get to practice with him. It encourages me to get stronger."

The opposing styles are not only good for the two to help each other, but Brown also benefits from having two different types of divers to work with. The coach can use the different styles in meets to increase scores.

"It's neat for me as a coach because they both sell for the judges differently," he said. "So we'll work off of their different styles and try to get the best scores from the judges that we can."

The duo's differences don't stop with their respective styles. Growing up a little more than an hour away from each other, the two actually competed against each other in high school and swam in the same district. Marchinski hails from Governor Mifflin High School in Shillington while McLain competed at Dallastown Area High School in York.

"We started as opponents, almost enemies really," McLain said. "I didn't know what to think of him." But as the season has rolled on,

the two have bonded, leaving old high school rivalry behind, and are trying to help each other improve whenever possible.

"One will encourage the other especially if one of them has just learned that dive," Brown said. "They'll give up some really helpful hints to be able to perform that dive for the first time as well as they could possibly do it."

Being the only two members of the team, they spend virtually all of their time together in practice. And outside the Natatorium, the two travel together to wherever the schedule takes them, rooming together at every away meet. The friendship they've formed has exceeded just a mutual respect between teammates.

At a recent practice, the two were asked to be photographed, preferably diving together.

The duo never does any kind of synchronized diving at all. But they almost instinctively took off from the board in unison. They flew through the air, making almost a mirror image of a perfect back two-and-a-half and finally entering the water with minimal splashing.

Just as they almost always do.

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## Pataky

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unleashed Sunday before the referee signaled the start of Pataky's match against Michigan's Sean Boyle.

Pataky said he concentrates on his gameplan as he paces the sideline, but he also focuses on starting the meet off right and being physical with an opponent.

After the redshirt junior shook Boyle's hand during the starting line-up announcement, he couldn't stop moving or energizing himself for the upcoming bout. The Clearfield native jumped in the air with knees bending backward and grappled a phantom opponent on the sideline.

Not even when assistant coach Troy Letters approached with advice

did Pataky stop moving. He simply nodded his head, agreeing to enact what Letters suggested.

"I was telling Brad to make sure he stays relaxed," Letters said. "Sometimes Brad can get so worked up before a match, by the time he gets out there, it's like he wrestled two, three matches already."

The whirlwind started at the referee's whistle.

In seconds, Pataky had his first takedown.

When the horn blew, the scoreboard read Pataky 13, Boyle 0. Pataky's energy had left its mark. His intensity swept through the Lion starters en route to a 29-10 win. No early hole would be set.

"He's real focused," head coach Cael Sanderson said. "He knows exactly what he's doing, what he's

doing to do. The whistle blows, he's getting after it."

Though Pataky's intensity set the tone Sunday, Letters knows the red-shirt junior's emotions before matches can also get him in trouble. Letters said sometimes the 125-pounder's mind can veer from thinking about the looming hand-tie battle, something Pataky has been working on.

Against Boyle, though, Letters thought Pataky performed up to par.

"He has all the tools to win the title," Letters said. "It's just he needs to make sure he thinks the right thoughts. Sometimes he thinks the wrong thoughts — just think of the right thing and let the wrestling do the talking."

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## Edwards

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Edwards' injury — the freshman posted a double-double with 10 points and 13 boards. He said making cuts was the toughest thing to do on his hurt ankle.

"That was one of the things that kept me out of the game," Edwards said. "To play basketball, you've got to be able to run, cut and jump, and I couldn't really cut and jump."

With no mid-week game, DeChellis said the extra rest will help the team recover from its injuries. The Lions did not practice Sunday, and, following a shorter practice Monday, will be off again today. Junior Talor Battle, the conference's second-leading scorer, said Edwards' return will play an important role in snapping the Lions' 11-game losing streak.

"It's gonna help us," Battle said. "Just like any other player on the team, he has a role to fill, and he has to come out ready to play. Hopefully when his name is called he can come out and rebound and score the basketball."

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## Defense

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Washington attributed the team's defensive struggles partially to its youth.

Freshmen Alex Bentley and Nikki Greene are mainstays in the starting line-up.

Once the Lions go to their bench, however, they are forced to use freshmen and sophomores who have had limited game experience.

"I don't think that is much of an excuse, but I will grant it some validity," Washington said.

"It isn't much of an excuse because you have to defend and you have to make the choice to do so."

With only five games remaining in the regular season, the Lions may need either to improve their zone or mix in more man-



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to-man defense, which is something they did more of earlier in the season.

Until the Lions regain their defensive identity and swarm the ball like they did during their first 19 games, Washington will continue emphasizing defense during practice.

"I am optimistic that we will continue to fight for the rest of the season," she said.

"But we have to have more determination and focus on the defensive end to stop teams from scoring as many points and as easy as they are scoring."

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