

Ex-Lion Anderson succeeding in pros

By Emily Kaplan
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

For much of the Nittany Lions' match against Ohio State on Sunday afternoon, a visitor sat in the top row — and couldn't sit still.

Matt Anderson was shifty, continually rearranging his legs, his lanky 6-foot-10 frame clearly uncomfortable in the constricting bleachers of Rec Hall.

Anderson's comfort zone is on the court, where he spent three dominant seasons as the Penn State men's volleyball team's premier player. As a junior in 2008 — when he was named the AVCA National Co-Player of the Year — the outside hitter helped steer the program to its second national championship.

But just two months after Anderson and Lions mugged for the cameras in celebration of their upset of West Coast power Pepperdine in the NCAA championship match, the West Seneca, N.Y., native made a surprising announcement. He had signed a two-year, six-figure contract with the Hyundai Capital Skywalkers of the Korean League and would forgo his senior season at Penn State.

It's been almost two years since his startling jump from Happy Valley to Hyundai, and Anderson — who spent the first week of the

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Matt Anderson
former Penn State outside hitter

MEN'S VOLLEYBALL



Anderson

Korean League's offseason in State College visiting his former teammates — seems to have few regrets.

"Of course I wonder what would have happened if I stayed," said Anderson, who will spend the rest of his summer with the U.S. National Team in Europe at the World Championships. "But I try not to think about it. It was a decision I made. And it was a really hard decision, but now I am focused on my professional career."

Volleyball-wise, Anderson's professional career is going exactly as planned. In his debut season, he recorded 2.9 kills per set on .419 hitting in leading the Skywalkers to a first-place finish in the regular season.

"On the court, he's been doing great," said his mother, Nancy Anderson. "He knew what he signed up for and he knew he was out there to have good seasons. But the culture is a lot different and I think that was harder than he thought."

The sport is a business-like operation in Korea.

It's all about unity, regimens and discipline.



Wendee Neubaum/Collegian

Former Lions outside hitter Matt Anderson (right) looks to pass in Penn State's practice March 16 in Rec Hall's South Gym. In his three years at Penn State, Anderson tallied 1,212 kills and was named national co-player of the year in 2008. Anderson left after his junior season to play for Korea's Hyundai Capital Skywalkers.

"It's volleyball 24/7," Anderson said.

The team — including some players in their 30s who are married and have children — lives together in a dorm-like facility. If a player wants to do something socially, he must first clear it with the team's officials. And Anderson, who speaks very little Korean, has an interpreter alongside him wherever he goes.

But, of course, there are the perks. Anderson, nicknamed "Super Matt" by his adoring Skywalker fans, has gained

celebrity status in South Korea.

After matches, girls will bring Anderson presents — everything from embroidered sweatshirts to flowers to his favorite foods.

One time, Nancy Anderson received a letter from a young female fan that said, "Thank you for sharing your son with us."

"It's a little weird sometimes," Nancy said. "The first time I went out there, people kept taking pictures of me and my husband. I swore I was going to see them on the Internet with the caption, 'My future in-laws.'"

But when Anderson returned to Penn State last week, he was just Matt, the kid from upstate New York with an easy-going personality and powerful swing.

He came to Rec Hall to practice a few days with the current team but couldn't stay long, as per NCAA regulations.

"His arm swing is quicker and he's a little better," coach Mark Hail said. "But he was in our gym. He's still Matty."

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Albrecht brings positive attitude to gym

By Kevin Kline
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Whenever Nick Grant has a bad day in the gym, the freshman knows Matt Albrecht will soon be there to pick up his mood.

"He always comes up and slaps me on the chest and goes, 'Smile, buddy,'" Grant said, "and it gets me going."

As one of the more vocal gymnasts on the team, and with several of his fellow upperclassmen battling injuries throughout the year, Albrecht has had to step into a bigger leadership role this season.

But the junior hasn't been able to totally avoid the injury bug himself. As a concussion and thumb injury kept him out of three dual meets this season, Albrecht continued to give his teammates advice from the bench during meets, with his cheers often loud enough to be heard throughout Rec Hall.

"We have a lot of guys who are reserved and quiet, and Matt can be that way, but he's certainly not opposed to getting excited and letting his emotions be worn on his sleeve," coach Randy Jepson said. "He's just got a big personality, and he's a great guy to have around."

MEN'S GYMNASTICS

Despite collegiate gymnastics being mainly a team sport, there is still plenty of focus on individual routines, which leaves many opportunities for the gymnasts to become dejected with their performances.

And with 10 true freshmen on the team this season, the need for an optimistic older teammate like Albrecht is especially important.

"Sometimes these guys get down on themselves, and it's good to keep the atmosphere positive and looking toward the future," Albrecht said.

"If you work happy, then you get better outcomes."

This season is just Albrecht's second competitive season. He arrived at Penn State from Canada after turning 21 and had to exhaust a year of eligibility under NCAA rules. He is a sophomore academically but a junior in eligibility.

His workload increased this year, as he's regularly competed in five events in each meet. In Saturday's loss at home to Oklahoma, Albrecht set career highs on floor exercise, pommel horse and parallel bars.

With a year under his belt and getting used to the rigors of the American collegiate gymnastics season, Albrecht's improvement in year two has coincided

nely with a year in that has battled injuries with his teammates.

"This year, it's been called upon a little bit more to step up and perform," Jepson said, "and he's been able to handle that much better this year than last year."

With the only starting junior being Warren Yang, who's suffered a rash of injuries and is likely to re-sit this season, Albrecht will likely be the lone senior on next year's squad.

Whether or not he gets voted team captain for 2011 is up to his teammates, as they will vote shortly after returning from the NCAA championships in four weeks, Jepson said.

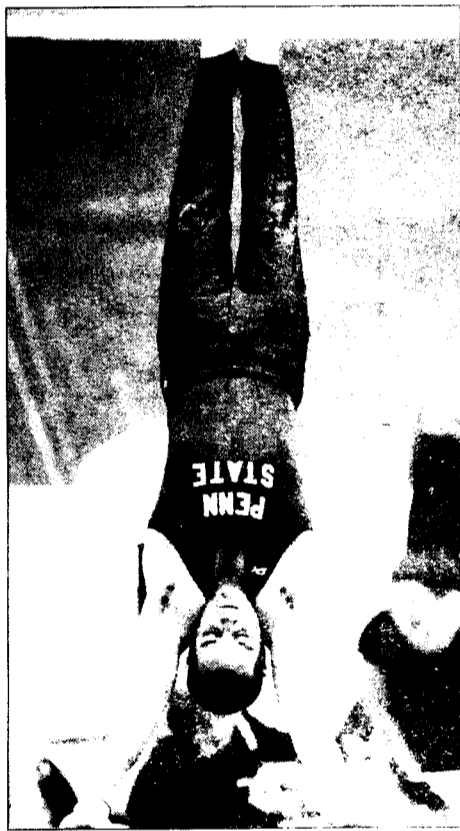
Albrecht knows he may be the leading candidate, but whether or not he earns the captain label won't change his role on the team.

"I'm definitely looking to be a leader again next year whether I be captain or not," Albrecht said. "The captain role is just a position, right? I always like to be a guy that they can look up to."

For Grant, the decision will be easy when it comes time to vote.

"If there had to be one person that I'd vote for, it'd definitely be him," Grant said.

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Matt Albrecht competes in the high bar in Penn State's meet Saturday at Rec Hall.

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