

# Women's gymnastics team lands three recruits

By Matt Howland  
FOR THE COLLEGIAN

The Penn State women's gymnastics team finalized its recruiting class on Wednesday when three high school gymnasts signed National Letters of Intent to attend Penn State next season.

## WOMEN'S GYMNASTICS

Alexis Carroll, Krystal Welsh and Alexandra Witt all signed with the Nittany Lions, the athletic department announced Wednesday.

The three were actually recruited by previous head coach Steve Shephard, who resigned last season after 18 years heading the team.

Despite not recruiting them for Penn State, Jeff Thompson, the team's new coach, had all three on

his recruitment list when he was head coach at Auburn last year.

He recruited Carroll, but she chose Penn State over Auburn. Welsh chose Penn State so early that Thompson didn't get the chance to talk to her. Shephard had offered scholarships to Carroll and Welsh, and Thompson chose to offer his remaining scholarship to Witt, who had originally committed to Auburn.

The team is losing only two seniors to graduation this year. Danielle Hover and Heather McElwee, so the new recruits will provide an extra boost to an already young team.

Hover and McElwee have six routines in training between them, three of which are proven to be competition-level, while the three new gymnasts will bring in 12 events in training. As a result, Thompson expects the team to be

even stronger next year.

Carroll, from Rockville, Md., is a strong all-around gymnast, and is the reigning USA Gymnastics Level 10 National Champion on vault. She also finished second in the all-around competition in the Region 7 Championships.

Her club gymnastics coach, Kelli Hill, highlighted Carroll's power as a strength for the gymnast, as well as her vault and tumbling. Hill said she hoped Carroll would be as successful in collegiate gymnastics as she was in club, and expected her success and development to continue.

"I think she'll be an asset to Penn State, as well as Penn State will be an asset to her," Hill said.

Welsh is also a successful all-around gymnast, and was highly recruited by many top schools, including Nebraska and Utah, before settling on Penn State,

according to her coach, Bob Ouelette.

Welsh finished second on floor exercise in the 2010 Region 7 Championships, and finished eighth in the all-around competition. She also finished sixth on the uneven bars at the 2010 Junior Olympic National Championships.

"She's a phenomenal gymnast, an incredible gymnast, easy to work with, incredibly dedicated," Ouelette said.

Ouelette said Welsh doesn't have any weak events, and expects her to utilize that strength to succeed at the college level.

"I think she's gonna walk into college and be one of the top recruits for the 2011-2012 season," Ouelette said.

Welsh, according to her dad, verbally committed to Penn State in the Beaver Stadium tunnel, before Shephard brought her onto

"I think [Carroll] will be an asset."

Kelli Hill

Carroll's club gymnastics coach

the field during a football game.

Witt finished fourth on both uneven bars and floor at the 2010 Region 8 Championships, and fifth in the all-around. She also finished fourth on uneven bars and eighth in the all-around at the 2010 Junior Olympic National Championships.

She was recruited by schools in the SEC, Big Ten, and Pac-10, and was initially committed to Auburn, but when Thompson moved to Penn State, she decided to follow.

Thompson is excited by the prospects of the new recruits.

"All three of them have the ability to be all-arounders right off the bat," Thompson said.

# Freshman hold high expectations for debut season

By Matt Howland  
FOR THE COLLEGIAN

The freshmen on the Penn State women's gymnastics team have some big shoes to fill.

The team graduated five seniors, who performed 48.7 percent of the competitive routines last year, including five-time All-American Brandi Personett, who finished second nationally on floor exercise last season.

Kassidy Stauder, Stephanie Brock, Cassidy Bogar, Kristin Blades and Lindsay Musgrove are the five freshmen tasked with replacing the graduates.

The coaches are hesitant to rely too heavily on freshmen right away, but they might not have a choice. The team doesn't have enough competitive routines from the upperclassmen on vault, floor exercise and balance beam, so freshmen might have to start as

early as the first meet, Jan. 7 at Alabama, associate head coach Rachele Thompson said.

"I'd like to not have to put them out right in the beginning so they can see what a couple of college meets are like."

Rachele Thompson said. "But I doubt that's gonna happen, we're probably gonna have to throw a couple of them in each lineup to start the season off."

The five gymnasts are experiencing some learning pains. They have to make the transition from competing in club gymnastics in high school, with coaches who tend not to push gymnasts to the limit, to the highly competitive mentality of collegiate gymnastics, where the job of the coach is

on the line if the team doesn't succeed.

The freshmen also have to adjust to the team mentality of NCAA competition.

"It's more of a team sport now, because club's more individual," Blades said. "So it's not just about you, it's about the whole team."

The stakes can be much higher in college, and with Thompson expecting 14,000 people to be at the Alabama meet, the freshmen will likely need some time to adjust to the pressure of an intercollegiate meet.

"Our freshmen are coming along, but they're not gonna replace five seniors, not right off the bat," head coach Jeff Thompson said. "So we know that there's a learning curve for them."

Despite their inexperience, it is important that the freshmen contribute this year. The head coach said if the freshmen aren't in the

lineup, the team will be in trouble.

The freshmen acknowledge the weight on their shoulders, but remain confident.

"There's pressure on the freshmen, cause we're the majority," Stauder said. "But the coaches and the upperclassmen are helping us stay calm about the pressure."

In practice the team performs pressure sets, with the stakes on either hitting their routine or the entire team doing more practice sets. This helps to acclimate the gymnasts to a situation where the entire team is counting on them to hit a routine.

The freshmen are doing their best to come in and push for starting spots. Stauder has stood out, and is likely to start on vault, balance beam, floor exercise and possibly uneven bars. Her expectations are high, and she said she wants to be the Big Ten balance

beam champion.

The other freshmen are also looking to start with Musgrove and Brock also hoping to compete in all four events, and Bogar in three. Blades is a lock to start on vault, and possibly floor as well. Jeff Thompson said.

The upperclassmen have high expectations for the freshmen this year, and for the team as a whole.

"I think the five freshmen that are replacing our seniors are all stepping up," junior Daryl Konsevick said.

"I think everybody's looking really strong."

Come Jan. 7 and the Alabama meet, the newcomers are going to have to be ready, with such an important load being placed on their shoulders.

"Those five freshmen are gonna have to have an impact and replace the five seniors we lost," Rachele Thompson said.



Thompson

# Men's gymnastics team looking to improve in 2011

By Katie Montgomery  
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

As Penn State men's gymnastics coach Randy Jepson watched his team stretch before practice Wednesday, he couldn't help but think about the hurdles his team would have to overcome this season.

## MEN'S GYMNASTICS

The most difficult hurdle being an inexperienced, young team.

After three of the Nittany Lions' best high bar and floor performers

graduated last season, Jepson is looking to fill their spots with younger athletes.

The team is comprised of mostly underclassmen, with captain Matt Albrecht leading the team as its only senior.

"We've got some guys that had competed last year for us a little bit," Jepson said. "But we didn't compete that well as a team and I'm looking to see that they've improved a little bit."

"But also, I want to see where our freshmen are at and get a sense for them. Some of the routines we're doing are a little more

than some of the guys can handle right now and I think part of what they're going to see is that maybe they're not quite ready for that but they're on their way."

Before the beginning of preseason, the team decided on a set of goals they hope to accomplish by the end of the season.

Number one on that list is to be at the top of the Big Ten.

"Obviously, that's where our goal is to be every year," Albrecht said. "But this year we have a strong focus toward it. We had a huge group that learned a lot last year in terms of competing and we

just want to take what we learned last year and develop it into a strong team this year."

Last season the team had trouble with consistency throughout their meets. After one gymnast struggled in an event, the rest of the team would crumble. Albrecht said.

Looking forward to this season, the Nittany Lions hope to reverse the snowball effect that has caused problems in the past by focusing on individual events and learning to trust each other, hopefully leading to consistency in each routine.

Both Albrecht and Jepson agree that confidence is the most important factor the Nittany Lions will have to improve on before the season begins at home against Army on Jan. 8.

"This year we want to be really confident within ourselves and focus on going out and doing our job," Albrecht said. "[Also] having trust that we'll do our routines when it comes down to it and trust that our teammates will be able to be consistent enough to hit their routines."

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