

While the 2003 Florida State volleyball team returns eight letterwinners, including three starters, from last year's ACC runner-up squad, the addition of eight new players will give the Seminoles a whole new look. With a roster that numbers 16, second year head coach Todd Kress will have many options and depth at every position. Another advantage of that depth will be the added competition among the players who are trying to earn starting positions.

The departure of last year's experienced senior class has opened the leadership door for veteran players like seniors Jennifer Anderson and Cerina Pele as well as juniors Aisha Carr, Ashley Meyer and Kameelah Omar. With this year's squad, leadership is an area that Kress is not concerned with.

"We already have leadership in place," Kress said, "and it's not that we have just one leader in this program, but a large group of leaders to where everyone is on the same page and has the same philosophy of wanting to work hard and take this program to the next level."

Coaching Staff

It didn't take long for Todd Kress to make a lasting impression on his team and on the ACC. In just his first year, Kress guided Florida State to a 21-13 record, including a 10-6 ACC record, and to the ACC Championship game. He wasn't finished there as Florida State received an at-large bid to the NCAA Tournament – the Seminoles' first appearance since 1998. With this early success, Kress' has immediately started a new tradition at Florida State.

His philosophy is based on the traditions of the past, working on excelling in the fundamentals, focusing on hard work in the classroom and on the court. Making the right decisions as a team will help lead to the ultimate goal of continuing a winning program and making it better.

Newcomers

The 2003 recruiting class will mix youth and experience with a whole lot of talent. Florida State welcomes freshmen Jessica Skower (S, Naples, FL), Cassie McLaughin (MB/Opp, Cary, IL), Sarah Griffin (OH, Hereford, TX), Nikki Anthony (OH, Pickens, SC), Kim Crawford (L/DS, Ft. Myers, FL) and transfers Renee Hill (OH, Iowa), Amanda Santos (MB, Southern Idaho) and Lindsay Curtiss (L/DS, Nova Scotia CC). With the talent at hand, Coach Kress is looking for these newcomers to step up and make an immediate impact.

"I think that this is a very talented group, a very competitive group and a very goal-oriented group, which are all things that we look for as attributes in a student-athlete when we bring them to Florida State for the volleyball program," he said.

Outside Hitters

With three key outside hitters lost to graduation, the Seminoles will have their work cut out for them at the position. While this position will be young for Florida State, it won't be lacking in talent. Sophomore Kristen Rust returns and although she saw



limited action last year, she was able to learn a great deal from veterans Erica Bunch, Kristin Frye and Alex Sevillano. With one year in the system, 2003 could prove to be a breakout season for the Cincinnati, Ohio native. Newcomers Nikki Anthony, Sarah Griffin and Renee Hill will also be vying for playing time at the outside hitter position. Anthony and Griffin were both outstanding middle hitters in high school but will make the move to the outside position at the collegiate level.

"It's going to be a rebuilding year for us on the outside," said Kress. "We lost two senior starters in Erica Bunch and Alex Sevillano and those are going to be huge shoes to fill because of the talent and leadership they both brought to the program. We also have some very capable and qualified kids coming in. I feel the production that we'll get from the outside is going to be by committee. It's going to be an open spot for us this year. Kristen Rust returns as a sophomore with a year of growth for us and she did some quality things this spring at the outside position. How well we do at the beginning will depend on the production we get from this spot. With the competition that we're going to have this fall at that spot, I am very comfortable that we'll fill it and get a lot of production out of it. It will be a key position for us this year."

Middle Hitters

Florida State returns experience to the middle position and with the addition of solid newcomers, the Seminoles will have many options in this area. Headlining the group is junior Aisha Carr, who led the team and finished eighth in the ACC in total blocks. She is the Seminoles' top returning kills leader and played in all but five games last season.

Junior Ashley Meyer saw very limited playing time last year but was a very productive player while in matches and will challenge for action again this year.

Newcomers Amanda Santos, Cassie McLaughlin and Sarah Griffin will also be training at the middle hitter position. McLaughlin and Griffin both come in as natural middles but will also be cross-training at the outside position.

“The middles are led by Aisha Carr, who had a solid sophomore campaign and I’m looking for her to have a breakout year as a junior,” said Kress. “She grew by leaps and bounds her sophomore year and the growth I saw from her in less than a year of working with her, I’ve never seen in any other athlete that I’ve worked with. She continued to improve every match and in the end proved to be one of the top middles in this conference. We really look to her leadership at that position this year. I am very comfortable with that position and the girls we have coming in. We are going to be led by our middles this year and Aisha is the leader of that group.”

Setters

A setter is to volleyball as a quarterback is to football and Florida State has the luxury of having two very willing and able players at this position. Seminole veteran Jennifer Anderson returns to lead the way for her final season at Florida State. Seeing action in all 34 matches in 2002, Anderson accumulated 1,734 assists, which not only led the Seminoles, but the ACC as well. She ranks second all-time at FSU in assists with 4,015 and her 1,734 assists last season is good for second on the Florida State individual single season list.

“Jen has a work ethic that is second to none,” Kress said. “She makes great decisions and she is a very mature, level-headed kid on the court.”

Freshman Jessica Skower will challenge for playing time at the setter position. Skower, who comes to Florida State by way of Naples, Fla., was a highly recruited setter out of high school.

“We are really going to fine tune some of Jessica’s skills and look to improve on some of her mechanics,” Kress said. “But as far as blocking and overall strength, Jessica is going to contribute greatly at the setter position.”

Defensive Specialist/Libero

Cerina Pele returns for her senior year and will be vital as a back row player. Pele played in 30 matches and ranked fourth on the team with 230 digs. A late season ankle injury resulted in off-season surgery, but she is expected to return at full strength for the Seminoles.

Junior Kameelah Omar returns this season after playing in 31 matches in 2002 and ranking fifth on the team with 158 digs. She recorded double-digit digs four times in 2002. Newcomers Kim Crawford and Lindsay Curtiss will provide added depth at the libero position.

“Cerina Pele did a tremendous job for us last year,” said Kress. “We lost her due to injury for a few weeks at the end of the season, but she does a great job and we have a strong supporting cast in place at that position. There will be a ton of

competition with several new girls coming in and anyone of them will be able to help us this year.”

Schedule

The 2003 schedule presents a great deal of excitement and challenge for the Seminole volleyball program. Florida State will face off against nine teams that advanced to the NCAA Tournament last year while FSU will play in-state matches against Jacksonville, Miami, Florida Atlantic, Central Florida and South Florida. Of those teams, three saw action in post-season play in 2002.

The front side of the schedule sees Florida State competing in some great tournament action. The Seminoles will open the season with the FSU Invitational where they will play host to Florida Atlantic, Kansas State and Michigan. They will then travel to the Century Tel/Roger Beasley Honda Premiere Tournament at Southwest Texas where they compete against Louisiana Tech, Arkansas State and Pepperdine. From there, the team will travel to California to play in the Sunset Classic at UC-Irvine where the Seminoles will play St. Mary’s, Houston and UC-Irvine. The Seminoles will finally return home in mid-September to host the FSU Classic with Jacksonville, Miami and Eastern Kentucky.

ACC action starts with a road trip to the state of North Carolina where the Seminoles will open league action against NC State and 2002 regular-season champion North Carolina. The ACC Tournament will be played at a neutral site in Orlando, Fla., this season, November 20-23.

“It is a schedule that is definitely going to challenge us, but one that I feel we need to play to prepare us for the ACC Tournament and the NCAA Tournament as we get to the end of November,” Kress said.

