

After a rebuilding year in 2003 that introduced eight newcomers to the Seminole volleyball program, FSU has the experience and athleticism that will have them ready to make a run at its first ACC Championship since 1998. Florida State returns 11 players who saw action in 2003 including ACC and East Region Rookie of the Year Cassie McLaughlin which will provide Head Coach Todd Kress with the most depth at every position since his arrival at FSU in 2002.

Sophomore setter Jessica Skower will take over the reigns at setter with the departure of Jennifer Anderson, Florida State's all-time leader in assists. After having a strong spring, Skower will finally get her chance to step in and run the Seminole offense on an every day basis. Skower had 604 assists in part-time duty behind four-year starter Anderson in 2003. The Seminoles also return five seniors including middles Aisha Carr and Amanda Santos, so leadership is something Kress is not worried about.

With former Olympian Rita Buck-Crockett joining the Seminole coaching staff, Kress is finally putting all of the pieces of his program together. Look for Florida State Volleyball to make a lot of noise in the ACC and on the national scene.

COACH KRESS SAID ON THE SEASON:

"This year we have the opportunity to be very good. There are a number of things that have to fall into place for that to happen. We have to have the leadership rise to the top and have those people set the expectations and uphold the standards. The thing with our sophomores, who played in 90-100 percent of our matches last year is it's not going to be anything new for them this year. The one benefit we are going to get out of last year is all of those young kids getting all of that experience. With any year, you need a little luck and you have to stay healthy. If we can stay healthy and some things fall into place for us, I think we are going to be very exciting to watch."

COACHING STAFF

In the off-season, Kress made an addition to his coaching staff with the hiring of former University of Iowa head coach and Olympian Rita Buck-Crockett. She replaced Jenny Fette who accepted the head coaching position at Thomas More College after spending the seasons as an assistant coach under Kress. Buck-Crockett has a strong history of recruiting the best athletes and combine that with the return of assistant coach Kirstine Jensen for her third season, the Seminoles are making their name in the volleyball world.

COACH KRESS ON RITA BUCK-CROCKETT:

"We have the privilege of adding Rita Buck-Crockett to our coaching staff this year. "First and foremost, she's a good person, big into family and has great character. When you look at what she has done professionally it's pretty much second to none as far as the things she has been able to accomplish as both a player and a coach professionally overseas. She's talked about staying

in coaching nine or 10 more years and us being a partnership in that time. By the time she's done she wants to win a national championship. That's always been my goal and the reason I came to Florida State. I didn't really put a time frame on it, but that's something we want to make happen. If we continue to take the strides training our kids and bringing in the best talent in the country, we feel we can accomplish that."

NEWCOMERS

The 2004 recruiting class shows what Kress is trying to do with the Florida State program in bringing in the nation's top talent. The Seminoles welcome freshmen Danielle McDonald (Holly, Hill, Fla.), Lauren Walker (Missouri City, Tex.), Summer Weissing (Boca Raton, Fla.) as well as transfers Andreza Santos (College of Southern Idaho) and Lauren Scott (Barton CC). Weissing and McDonald will look for immediate playing time while Santos and Scott will bring in experience and a high talent level that is very beneficial to this year's team. Scott's Barton Community College team won the 2003 NJCAA National Championship. Andreza is the older sister of current Seminole middle blocker Amanda Santos. Andreza was a NJCAA first team All-American after leading the Scenic West Athletic Conference with 609 kills and a .412 hitting percentage in 2003.

COACH KRESS ON THE NEWCOMERS:

"It's a diverse group of newcomers because we've got a number of freshmen and a couple of transfers. They all have an opportunity to make an impact on the program this year. The freshmen class is headed by Summer Weissing who was a Fab 50 student athlete this year as a senior. She led her program to three state championships and had a tremendous senior season. She is someone who is going to come in and really help us out in the ball control area defensively with her ball control and passing. She's the type of student athlete we want to bring in to this program. Danielle McDonald is also an in-state kid that we really wanted to have as a part of our program. What is appealing about Danielle is that she is very versatile. She can play any of the front row positions. She played mostly middle in high school, but also had some training on the opposite and left sides."

"Andreza Santos, Amanda's older sister, played at the College of Southern Idaho this past year and then tore her ACL the day before the national championship tournament started. So she is coming back off that injury. All reports that we have heard is that she is getting close to 100 percent. If she is at 100 percent, she can redefine that outside position for us. She can be a leader out there for us. She plays with a lot of fire and is a very efficient outside hitter.

"Lauren Scott is somebody who has really improved her game a lot in the last two years. I think she has yet to see her best volleyball. She is still improving at a fast pace. I think her two years at Florida State will be by far her best of her career."

"The other newcomer we should really look at is Renee Hill. Last year she came in and redshirted. She wasn't back from her knee injury and tried to go, but just couldn't do it. She trained overseas this year in the offseason and now is at 100 percent. Renee at 100 percent is going to help everybody, with her leadership on the court and her ball control skills. She's able to score from both the outside and opposite positions. She's kind of the diamond in the rough type player for us this year. She wasn't able to produce a whole lot for us last year, but she will be a huge benefit for us this year."

"Lauren (Walker) will be a walk-on for us and I think with the right training will be a great defensive player in our program. She's looking up to sophomore Sarah Griffin that is leading the way at that position. Rita (Buck-Crockett) has highlighted her as someone that she thinks can be a tremendous defensive specialist for us in the future."

OUTSIDE HITTERS/OPPOSITES

The Seminoles return, and have added, a lot of power at the outside and opposite position. ACC and East Region Rookie of the Year Cassie McLaughlin returns for her sophomore season along with Kristen Rust, Sarah Griffin, Nikki Anthony and Renee Hill. On top of that, Coach Kress has brought in Andreza Santos, Danielle McDonald and Summer Weissing for what should provide for a potent offense. Junior transfer Lauren Scott also has the ability to play the opposite, so don't be surprised if she plays both the opposite and middle positions for FSU.

COACH KRESS ON THE OUTSIDE HITTERS/OPPOSITES:

"Cassie fit into a role that we needed last year and did a great job in fitting into that role. We needed someone to take over the offensive load and she did that very well. She led us in kills and was the ACC and East Region Freshman of the Year. Cassie is somebody that will out work anyone. If there is a competition ahead of her, she is going to try and go out and win that competition."

"The nice thing about our team this year is that we have more depth at every position. We have so many great athletes at every position. The outsides definitely have more depth there than anything with Nikki Anthony, Andreza Santos, Kristen Rust, Summer Weissing, Sarah Griffin and even Renee Hill could play some outside for us, so we have a lot of depth at the outside spot. The one thing we need to do this year at the outside spot is score and score consistently. If you look at the top programs in our conference and in the country, they have outsides that consistently score, don't make mistakes and keep the ball in play. Last year we made too many mistakes and unforced errors at that position that we can improve on this year."

