

Senior Volleyball player sets up for Olympics

Meredith Foster

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Rachel Wells, a senior volleyball player, ends her career on a high note as she attends the open Olympic tryouts in February.

"If someone would have told me as a freshman that I'd be in this position today, I would have never believed them," Wells said.

Wells finished her senior season in 2013 leading the nation in digs per set at 6.38.

"When Coach first told me where I was ranked early in the season, I was expecting to hear a three digit number," Wells said. "When he told me I was ninth, I couldn't believe it."

Wells had 746 digs on the season, the second most in school history. She also posted the most digs for a single match in the 2013 season with 54 against Radford. Despite losing the match in 4 sets, Wells averaged an unheard of 13.5 digs per set.

"Our match against Radford was a really emotional night for us because it was senior night, and our last game in the Justice Center," Wells said. "We all wanted to win for our fans and for each other, so we were motivated to do everything that we could to win."

Wells walked on to the UNC Asheville women's volleyball team in the fall of 2010 because she wasn't ready for her to career to be over yet, Wells said. When she walked off the court after her last collegiate match said she has similar feelings.

"We finished our season right before Thanksgiving break, and as soon as we got back I was ready to play again," Wells said. "After talking with Coach Santos, I decided that going to the tryouts was what I wanted to do."

According to Fredrico Santos, volleyball coach at UNCA, once the season ended he offered to help Wells prepare; however, he made it clear that the choice was hers.

"The main thing is, I told her to be herself, and believe in what she has," Santos said. "I didn't want her to make a big change to try to be like the other players she might come across."

According to Santos, Wells' strength is in her lack of fear of going to the floor.

"In her junior and senior years it became instinctual for her to go to the floor on defense," stated Santos. "She became concerned with pursuing the ball and instinctually I think that's her greatest asset."

According to Santos, Wells' heart and determination will be what makes her stand out much more than any kind of technique.

"We're doing a lot of the same things we did in season to prepare for the tryouts," said Omar Ahmad, head strength and conditioning coach.

We really just want to maintain what we worked up to in season in order to set her up to continue to play at a high level, added Ahmad.

"My hope for her is to get rid of any nagging injuries that may have come during season, and just to have her feeling capable and really fresh for that weekend," Ahmad said.

The tryouts will be held at the Olympic training center in Colorado Springs, Colo., an altitude adjustment of 4,000 feet above Asheville for Wells.

"One thing a little I'm trying to do a little differently is a little more cardio than usual to make up for the difference in elevation," Wells said.

A lot of Wells' cardio comes from one-on-one practices and they're a little more ramped up than usual, according to Ahmad.

"In addition to the workouts, we've been watching film to find other ways to make improvements," Wells said.

Wells will leave for the tryouts on Feb. 21, and stay on campus at the Olympic training Center until Feb. 23.

"I'm not really nervous about it anymore, I'm looking at it more as just another weekend that I get to play," Wells said. "I don't have any expectations. I'm excited to go for the experience and to meet a lot of new people."

In Asheville, Wells' coaches and teammates are proud of her for taking advantage of the opportunity.

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