

Records topple

Written by Deb Egenberger

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Swede volleyball team sets five new school records.

Gothenburg's volleyball record shows the Swedes played 27 games this fall.

In the minds of each player, though, that number is at least 54 if not higher.

"One of our main focuses this year as coaches was training the girls in the mental aspects of the game," said coach Mary Clark.

Serving, passing, setting and hitting are the basic mechanics of volleyball, she said, but mental imagery can significantly improve the overall game.

"Olympic athletes do it," Clark said. "The girls learned to play a whole game in their minds before they ever stepped on the court."

What that did for the athletes, Clark believes, is teach them to focus.

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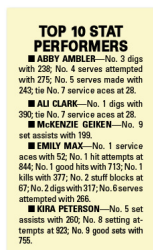
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“We set our expectations very high and they responded,” she said. “Our practice drills were designed to put them under pressure and we demanded focus every day.”

Reaching that next level individually in the mental game translated to a more competitive team on the court.

The Swedes finished the year with a 12-15 record, more wins than the past two seasons combined.

“I am really proud of the fact that they were willing to step up and take the pressure we put on them,” Clark said. “They wanted to be better. I loved their attitude as a whole and I am proud of the way they competed.”



The results show in the year-end statistics. Five Swedes find new or higher spots on the school's all-time Top 10 list, including five new school records.

Senior Emily Max takes over the top spot in three hitting categories as well as service aces. She also moves into second in defensive digs and stuff blocks.

“It is rare these days to find a volleyball player who is as outstanding as Emily in the front row and also in the back row,” Clark said of Max. “She carried a lot of pressure as our go-to girl.”

Max blasted the school record in hit attempts swinging 844 times. She had 713 good hits and 377 kills, surpassing the old kill record by 122.

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The middle hitter also dominated the net defensively, with 131 blocks including 67 stuffs to put her in second in that category.

In addition, Max smacked 52 ace serves.

“Players like that don’t come around every day,” Clark said.

Junior libero Ali Clark also set a new school record with 390 defensive digs, nearly twice the previous record of 194.

“We put a lot of emphasis on our primary passers,” Clark said. “Everything we do starts there.”

And offensive success builds from defensive plays.

Holding down the back row, Max climbs to second in digs with 317 and junior Abby Ambler is third with 238.

“Very few balls dropped in our back row,” Clark said. “Those girls communicated well and worked well together.”

Solid passing also helped two girls capture Top 10 spots in the setting categories.

Senior setter Kira Peterson makes the all-time list at No. 5 in set assists, No. 8 in setting attempts and No. 9 for good sets.

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Fellow setter McKenzie Geiken, a junior, now has the No. 8 and No. 9 spots in set assists offering 199 this season.

“I probably put more pressure on the setters than anyone else on the floor,” Clark said. “They both came a long way in the mental understanding of the game and their willingness to learn and execute the different sets.”

Ambler also earned the No. 4 position in serves attempted, No. 5 place for serves made and ties No. 7 in service aces with 28.



The records are great and the statistics show solid improvement, Clark said, but it was the total team effort that pleases her in the end.

“These girls played like a family,” she said. “They bonded together to get through the season and I feel like they gave us everything they had.”

From here forward, the Swedes must learn to play a new style of volleyball.

“Everything we did offensively this year focused around Emily,” Clark said. “We will need to have a more balanced offensive attack next year. We will have a different look, that’s for sure.”

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