



TODAY'S SPORTS EXTRA

High-Flying Heyne Becoming Force for K-State Volleyball

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By Corbin McGuire

K-State volleyball redshirt freshman Brooke Heyne tends not to pay attention to outside praise or doubt. She's been that way as long as she can remember.

When people told her how impressive her vertical leap was when she was 13 years old, she shrugged it off. Once, on the fourth day of a 16-year-old national tournament, Heyne's team wore vertical trackers and hers registered as high as 29 inches. She was the only one not amazed.

"Everyone thought that was crazy," she said. "It just kind of kept building."

Heyne's vertical is at the core of her volleyball talent. Without it, the 5-foot-11 outside hitter would not have had a chance to play at the Division I level. Even with it, she said plenty of people told her she would be better off switching to a back row position or consider going to a smaller school if she wanted to have success as an outside hitter.

Again, she did not listen. She just kept building, all while keeping a chip on her shoulder.

"I think that's kind of grown a little bit more into being, like, 'I can handle myself. I can hold my own.' I have to keep progressing and keep building on that," Heyne said. "I think I want to try to put a message out there that just because you're tall doesn't always mean you're going to be super great, or if you're shorter, you can still be great."

Recently, Heyne has taken steps toward getting her message across.

On Monday, she was named the Big 12 Rookie of the Week after posting double-digit kills in back-to-back wins over ranked opponents.

She notched 12 kills, including the match-clinching one, against No. 22 Kansas in her first career start to help propel K-State to its first win over its in-state rival since 2014 and its first home victory against the Jayhawks

since 2011. She followed that performance with a career-high 15 kills on a career-high .467 hitting percentage in a three-set win at No. 24 Baylor on Saturday.

Both outings led to Heyne's Big 12 honor. She joined Gloria Mutiri as the second Wildcat this season to earn the award. They also boosted her confidence, one part of her that, compared to her vertical jump, is harder to notice when she plays but may be just as important toward her continued development.

"I'm really shy, so I don't like attention on me that much. I think it's more of a personal, internal confidence as opposed to being externally cocky. I come into practice ready for the next one, trying to keep earning my spot. Because nothing's ever given, and I've learned that here," Heyne said. "I feel like earning it is really important to me. That's just my mentality for every practice."

For an entire season, all Heyne did was practice.

Redshirting is not easy for anyone, let alone a player with as decorated of a high school career as Heyne. She was named the 2016-17 Gatorade Nebraska Player of the Year, the National High School Coaches Association Senior Volleyball Player of the Year and an All-American by multiple publications for her work at Skutt Catholic High School.

"It was hard," Heyne admitted of her redshirt season, but she made it easier by finding the success she used to feel in matches, in practices.

"I started feeling it in practice when I was playing against the starting side and being able to work them a little bit and help make them better, which made me feel good," she said. "It was difficult, but you get through it, and this year it feels like it's paying off."

Specifically, she said her vision to identify the right play on every attack has grown immensely. She credited associate head coach Jeff Grove, whom often sends her videos of her with feedback, for helping her develop a bigger attacking toolbox.

"He's helped a lot. I've trusted and fell back on that feedback a lot," she said, as K-State hosts Oklahoma on Wednesday at 7 p.m. "I was able to figure out how fun it is to tool blocks and make people frustrated and get points that way. I've become more crafty and creative with my shots and my vision, but I've always trusted being in high-ball situations."

Each match, Heyne has become a little more comfortable, too. Early this season, she said she would be timid and "starstruck by it all" on the court. Now, she's calm and confident.

"Everything's just clicking. I can see hands in front of me. I have great vision. I feel like I'm at my highest peak with max jumping. Everything's just flowing super slowly, almost in slow motion," she said. "Recently I've just been able to control that a little bit more and not get freaked out if I make a mistake.

"I just see the ball, I go get my feet to it, I jump, I fly, and I trust myself."

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