Season Preview: DS/Liberos

A position-by-position preview of the 2012 MT volleyball team

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - As the Blue Raiders wrap up the first week of training camp, it's time to preview the 2012 Middle Tennessee volleyball team position by position. Today it's the defensive specialist and libero positions. The Blue Raiders were one of the top defensive teams in the Sun Belt in 2011 with the second-most blocks per set (2.56) and the third-lowest hitting percentage (.181). With the departure of Brynne Henderson, who led the team in digs last season, four Blue Raiders are looking for playing time as the back line of the Middle Tennessee defense.

"We have very good competition right now at the libero and defensive specialist positions," said head coach Matt Peck Tuesday." "All four of them - Lindsey Purvis, Bri McCombs, Halie Vannoy and Kendall Howard -have played the position and are passing well in serve receive. They're doing well defensively because we have such a big block. Bri is the new kid on the block, but came in with a lot of experience playing at a high level in USAV. It's wide open for us right now."

"We're all working really hard, so it's going to be a close call," Purvis added. "I think our defense is doing really well. Our passing is definitely picking up from where it was last week."

Purvis and Vannoy each saw considerable playing time last season. As a junior in 2011, Vannoy tallied 142 digs including 10 against Ohio State in the NCAA Tournament. Purvis added 133 digs last season and averaged 1.45 digs per set. With the depth at the position, any combination of those two plus Howard and McCombs could see playing time in 2012.

"As of today, I have not made any decision on who the libero will be let alone who's going to be where," added Peck. "We've been mixing them up around a lot in the back row. We're pleased with that right now. Those kids are working hard. It's a great position to be in for us that we can put any four of them in. They've all been passing really well, as has Chelsea Ross, and that's huge for our team because of the system we run."

While Middle Tennessee has become known for being a great blocking team, it's still up to those

back row players to make good passes and get the offense running. That includes digging up deflections off the block and being an extra set of eyes in the back.

"If we don't get the ball up, then we're not going to score," said Vannoy. "We put a lot of pressure on ourselves to get the ball to where our hitters can do their job. We also help out the hitters by talking about what's open on the court because we see the court better from the back."

"We're not finishing in the top-half of the conference in digs per set, but I think we're one of the best defensive teams because our block does such a good job and also because we attack at a high percentage so not a lot of balls are coming over the net," said Peck about his team's defense. "I think a lot of times our defensive players are overlooked, but they're crucial to us especially in serve receive and playing those deflections off the block."

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