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Six veterans head U.S. volleyball team

AP Associated Press

By **Dave Campbell**, AP Sports Writer | July 9, 2004

Half of the United States' women's volleyball team that finished a surprising fourth in Sydney will return to the Olympics next month and try to win its first gold medal.

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Led by star outside hitter Logan Tom and veteran middle blocker Danielle Scott, the United States qualified for the Athens Games by taking third in last year's World Cup. They'll arrive in Greece as the second-ranked team in the world -- behind China, its first pool-play foe on Aug. 14.

"Hopefully we peak at the right time," Scott said. "The gold is very realistic for us."

The 12-player men's and women's teams, announced Friday by USA Volleyball, are subject to approval by the U.S. Olympic Committee. Neither team has medaled since 1992, when each earned a bronze in Barcelona.

Outside hitter Tara Cross-Battle, middle blocker Heather Bown, setter Robyn Ah Mow-Santos and libero Stacy Sykora join Tom and Scott as the six returners from 2000. Cross-Battle will be the first player in USA Volleyball history to compete in four Olympics, and Scott is headed to her third.

Men's coach Doug Beal, who guided the Americans to a gold in 1984, brought five players back from his 2000 team: setter and captain Lloy Ball; libero Erik Sullivan; middle blockers Tom Hoff and Ryan Millar; and outside hitter Kevin Barnett.

Ball, a starter in the 1996 and 2000 Olympics, was going to retire from the national team -- but decided to return after two years off following Sydney.

The men, who lost all five matches in a disastrous, injury-influenced performance at the Sydney Games, are currently ranked No. 6 in the world and will play No. 2 Italy when pool play begins in Athens on Aug. 15.

"I think we have a good team and every reason to believe we can fight for a medal," Beal said. "I don't think the tournament in 2000 is going to have an impact. Every year's kind of a new game."

The women's squad, coached by Toshi Yoshida, also includes setter Lindsey Berg; middle

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blocker Wiz Bachman; opposites Tayyiba Haneef and Nancy Metcalf; and outside hitters Keba Phipps and Ogonna Nnamani.

The rest of the men's team includes setter Donald Suxho; middle blocker Phil Eatherton; outside hitters Gabe Gardner, Reid Priddy and Riley Salmon; and opposites Brook Billings and Clay Stanley. ■

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