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Monday, April 3

Is blocker Danielle Scott getting shorter

By Doug Haney // usolympicteam.com // July 12, 2004

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In 2000, USA Women's Volleyball was close to winning their first Olympic medal since 1984. They settled for fourth, but not happily.

As one of two returning vets from the seventh place 1996 team, middle blocker [Danielle Scott](#) led the U.S. defense through that 2000 Olympic charge with 33 blocks, a high for the tournament over all players. She also amassed 101 kills and 32 digs. For the 6'2" Scott, towering is part of her game, but the game is getting bigger or at least the girls playing.

"In 2000, I was one of the tallest players on the court for any country, now I seem to be getting shorter," said the Long Beach State 3-time All American. "Right now I'm six down on the U.S. roster alone and I'm not getting any taller."

However the U.S. is getting better. Ranked 10th when entering Sydney, the Americans were a long shot for the medal round and a physically draining fourth place finish behind world power Brazil was better than anyone had anticipated.

This time around the Olympic block, the USA is World ranked No. 2.

Now one of three returning vets from the 2000 squad, the 10-year national team member remains one of the strongest in the line-up, leading the U.S. to a bronze medal at the 2003 World Cup and in turn, an Olympic birth.

Now here's the kicker: Scott hadn't even planned on competing in Sydney.

"It's nearly impossible for a player to make a living out of indoor volleyball in the United States. Players in Europe and in South America are earning anywhere from \$35,000 to \$100,000 per year to play in pro leagues," said Scott, who played in Brazil leading up to the 2000 Olympic run. While that may not seem like a lot to American pro athlete standards, it's a lot to a volleyball player."

When 2000 Olympic coach Mick Haley took over the helm in 1997, he tried to get Scott back on the team. She wasn't buying, opting to give the WNBA a try instead and when that didn't pan out, she accepted an offer from a pro team in Brazil that would pay the bills and then some. It took U.S. volleyball officials easing of the rules that allowed her to continue to compete professionally between major international competitions. It was enough to lure her back for Sydney.

"It's just what you have to do," she said. "It'd be great if there was a pro league in the U.S. that was lucrative, but it just doesn't exist, so as a player, you have to go to the game."

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And right now, the game is in Italy, where she is currently playing professionally. Yet it hasn't changed her medal focus.

“Even after all these seasons as a pro, the desire to win an Olympic medal is still strong. I love the game and that's why I continue to play, but winning a medal is a true focus that I've committed to – maybe the third time will be the charm.”

With only eight games to do it, the Olympic format is more condensed version of play. Each time the ball is in play, the stakes are high and so is the pressure. According to Scott, it's about maintaining the intensity without losing focus.

“We may be ranked No. 2 right now and that's big for our program and our confidence, but the important thing is not to get beyond ourselves and what we're working for as a team. I'm in this because after 10 seasons with this team, I still have the desire to win and I have no doubt the other girls on the court with me feel the same way.”

Current head coach Toshi Yoshida, who took over the program after the Sydney Games agrees saying that the entire team is hungry. “I've already told our players that our next goal, our next mission, is to go for the gold in Athens.”

And while Scott may not be getting any younger or taller, she says that Athens may not be the last time you see her in the Olympic uniform. Following the Games, she'll return to Italy to continue her professional career, and, as she says, “who knows, I'll play until they tell me I'm no good anymore and even then, I'll probably still play.”

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