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SEARCH 2000 Games

Friday, September 15, 2000

Volleyball team talking the talkBy **LANDON HALL** -- The Associated Press

SYDNEY, Australia (AP) -- Danielle Scott gave up a cushy, high-paying job playing professionally in Brazil, where her ferocious hitting and imposing 6-foot-2 frame have made her known as the Shaquille O'Neal of volleyball.

All for a chance to help the U.S. women's volleyball team redeem itself from a miserable seventh-place Olympic finish four years ago.

"I think we can definitely medal," Scott said. "We're a really good team. We've got a lot of talent. We just have to have everyone play at their best."

Scott and Tara Cross-Battle are the only players on the 12-woman roster with any Olympic experience. Cross-Battle was on the 1992 team that won the bronze medal, but she and Scott shared the disappointment of Atlanta.

"We were expected to win the gold, and we didn't reach our goal," Scott said.

Scott, 27, and Cross-Battle, 32, are the two oldest members of the U.S. team, and they're also virtual mercenaries who joined the team just in time to make it competitive. Scott struck an arrangement with coach Mick Haley that allowed her to stay in Brazil and only join the national team when it needed her for international tournaments. She began playing with the team in May 1999. Cross-Battle

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didn't join up until January.

One big change Haley made recently was to switch starting setters, from Charlene Tagaloa to Robyn Ah Mow. One of Ah Mow's strengths is delivering the ball to Scott, the American's only real big hitter.

"Robyn brings a little quicker offense and she's a little more feisty on the court, so her presence is really good," Scott said. "It's just two different personalities out there. Either one is capable of leading this team, but right now Robyn's doing the job."

Until five weeks ago, the Americans hadn't beaten any of the world's top teams since the 1996 Olympics. But at the Grand Prix in Asia, the Americans posted their two most impressive victories, just five days apart. They beat No. 5 Korea in four games on Aug. 13, then turned around and upset No. 4 China in five games. The victory ended a 10-match losing streak to the Chinese.

"There's no question that that helped us tremendously," Haley said. "Once you beat a team one time, it breaks the barrier."

Haley, who has gambled by benching some veterans in favor of youngsters such as Kerri Walsh and Stanford teammate Logan Tom, sees a fourth-place finish as the same as last place.

"The one thing that Americans have that is unique is that we always expect to win. We're just irritated when we lose," the coach said.

Scott said she wouldn't have rejoined the team if she didn't think it could get a medal.

"That's totally Danielle's attitude, and you can see it every day in practice," Tom said. "It's a sign that we're coming here to take care of business."

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