

# volleyball

TEAM CONTINUES STRONG PLAY

by Jeff Kelly

Using a pair of All-Americans who hold program records for assists and kills in a career typically is reflected in a team's preseason ratings. So when Austin College lost its all-time leader in assists in **Veronica Stephens '07** and the all-time kills leader in **Becca Harpham '07**, it would have been only natural for college coaches to overlook the 'Roos in the American Volleyball Coaches Association preseason top-25 poll.

Instead, the coaches who vote in that poll awarded the 'Roos with the highest ranking in program history at No. 14. Perhaps that, as much as anything else, is a sign that coach **Ed Garza's** program has officially arrived as a perennial national power.

While Garza did lose two of the best in program history in Stephens and Harpham, he returned another All-American in **Kaitlin Listol '08** and brought in six talented freshmen in what is arguably the best recruiting class in his tenure at Austin College.

"This freshman class is very talented," said Listol of the six newcomers. "I knew the first day of fall camp that **Morgan Ballard '11** was going to make a huge impact on our season. She has such natural ability and she seems to get better and better every week. Having freshmen who can make the plays on the court has really forced all of us to work hard and get better in order to keep our spots on the court."

Of course, having so many young and untested players requires strong senior leadership, and Listol proved more than ready for the task.

"I really did feel that with Becca [Harpham] and Vee [Stephens] leaving that I would have to step up not only on the court but in the leadership role," said Listol. "I love having a leadership role on the team and having the underclassmen look up to me. It has been a fairly easy transition for me, mostly because our team is such a great group and we all are so close."

Behind the strong play of Listol plus **Ashley Hummel '08**, **Jessica Rose '09**, and **Jessica Phillips '10**, the 'Roos quickly proved themselves deserving of their high preseason ranking, racing out to a 9-0 start

before falling to Southern Collegiate Athletic Conference rival Rhodes in a tough 3-2 battle Sept. 14 at the second SCAC Crossover Tournament.

After stumbling briefly against Rhodes, then against Birmingham-Southern and SCAC favorite Trinity, Garza got his team back on track with 16 consecutive wins to bring them to 26-3 on the year following the fourth and final SCAC Crossover, including a decisive win over Rhodes on the Lynx home floor.

Over the season, the 'Roos had plenty of highlights, with Garza earning the 300th win in his Austin College coaching career and Listol breaking Harpham's kills record in a Sept. 28 match against Ouachita Baptist at the Austin College Classic.

"I still remember when I got my first win, and my 300th felt the same way," said Garza of his historic victory. "We were not always a top-25 program. It took us eight years to reach the top 25, and we have worked hard to stay there. It is much easier to be knocked down from the top than it is to reach the top so we value the journey we have taken to get here."

Listol and Ballard each earned SCAC Player of the Week honors during the course of the season. For Listol, becoming the all-time kills leader was a goal heading into the season.

"I had no clue that I was close," said the senior. "It turned out that I had a group of really close friends attend the record-breaking game, so it became much more special that they were there as well as my family."

While Listol's continued excellent play was a given heading into the season, one of the most pleasant surprises of the year has been the outstanding play of Phillips, who took over for Stephens after getting sparse playing time as a freshman.

Following such a successful player was a tall task for Phillips, but she proved up to the task, developing into one of the top setters in the conference. Twice she totaled 68 assists and added a 74-assist performance Oct. 13 in a five-game win over Southwestern, placing her in the top five all-time assists for a single match performance. As of the

midway point in the season, Phillips was leading the conference in that category.

“Jessica has really stepped up into the setting role and I feel that she has surpassed everyone’s expectations,” said Listol. Garza agreed with his All-American on the performance of the sophomore setter.

“Jessica’s quick emergence has allowed us a nearly seamless transition, a rarity when changing setters,” said the coach. “We’ve been able to maintain our style of play and run the same systems without having to scale back at all. Our hitters have remained in sync without having to adapt their abilities to fit the new setter. Veronica’s legacy was well established. Jessica will establish her own legacy and she’s making the most of the opportunity to do so.”

The ‘Roos clinched the second seed in the inaugural SCAC Tournament in November. To make it an even more special event for the team, Austin College was chosen as the tournament’s first host.

**LATE UPDATE:** Making it to the championship game of the SCAC tournament Nov. 3, the Austin College ‘Roos couldn’t pull out the victory, losing 3-2 to the No. 1-seeded Trinity University Tigers.

Rose had 23 kills and 13 digs for Austin College, and Listol had 20 kills and 23 digs. Phillips had a tournament-high 68 assists. Listol and Hummel were named to the All-Tournament Team.

Listol was named SCAC Player of the Year, breaking the SCAC single-season kill record with 646. Ballard was named the SCAC Freshman of the Year and Garza was named SCAC Coach of the Year.

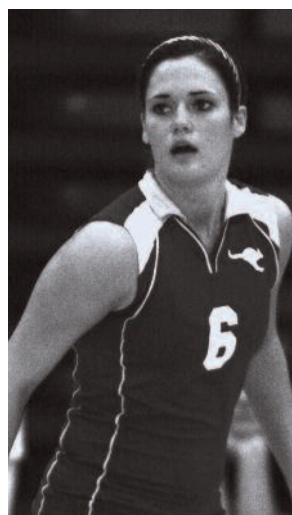
The ‘Roos earned a spot in the NCAA Regional Tournament, yet to begin at presstime. ∞



Jessica Phillips



PHOTO BY JACQUELINE ARMSTRONG



Jessica Rose



Morgan Ballard



Coach Ed Garza



Kaitlin Listol



Ashley Hummel

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