

5'1" frosh finds height no obstacle

Nekota quarterbacks volleyballers

By JOHN HEALY
Of the Emerald

Michelle Nekota plays in the trenches.

While her teammates on the women's volleyball team soar above the net for spikes and blocks, Nekota stays earthbound.

At 5'1", she's not tall enough to play as a hitter or blocker in college volleyball.

But height isn't everything, according to coach Chris Voelz. That's why Nekota, a freshman from Honolulu, is quarterbacking the team this season from the setter position.

"Michelle leads with her hands," says Voelz. "There's no doubt she's in charge."

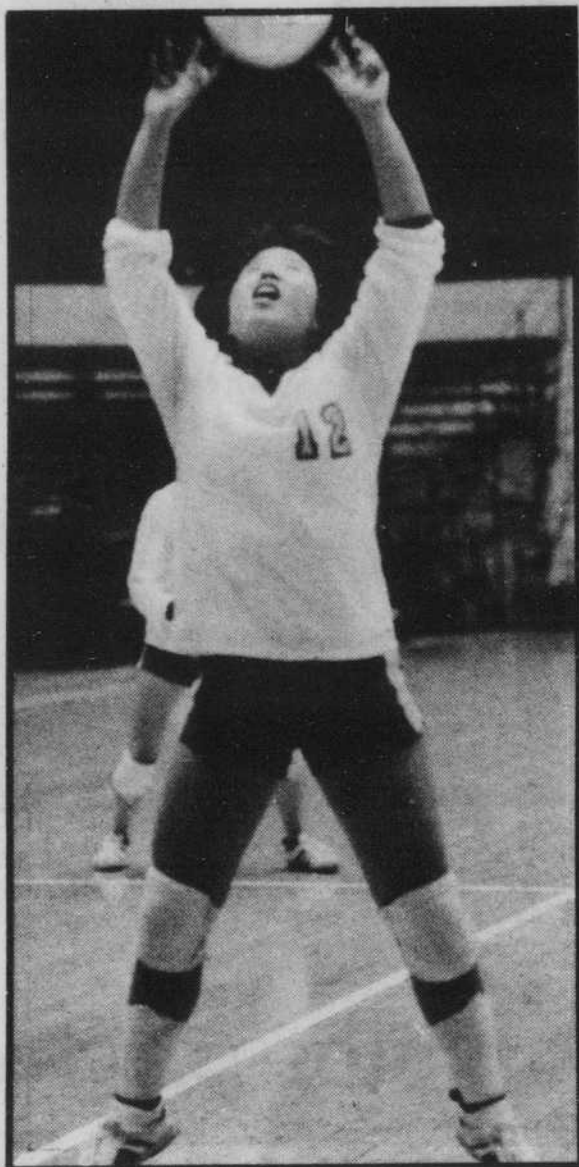
Nekota's primary responsibility is setting up the offense, according to Voelz. "She calls the play, sets the ball to her hitter, then covers on defense."

This is quite a bit of responsibility for the freshman walk-on from Kalani High School.

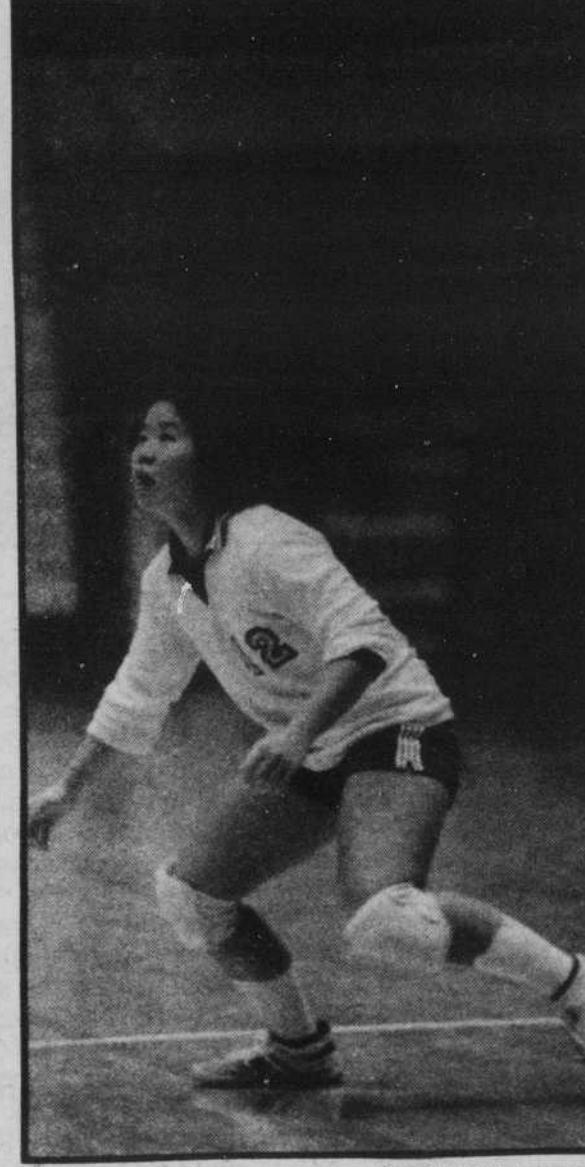
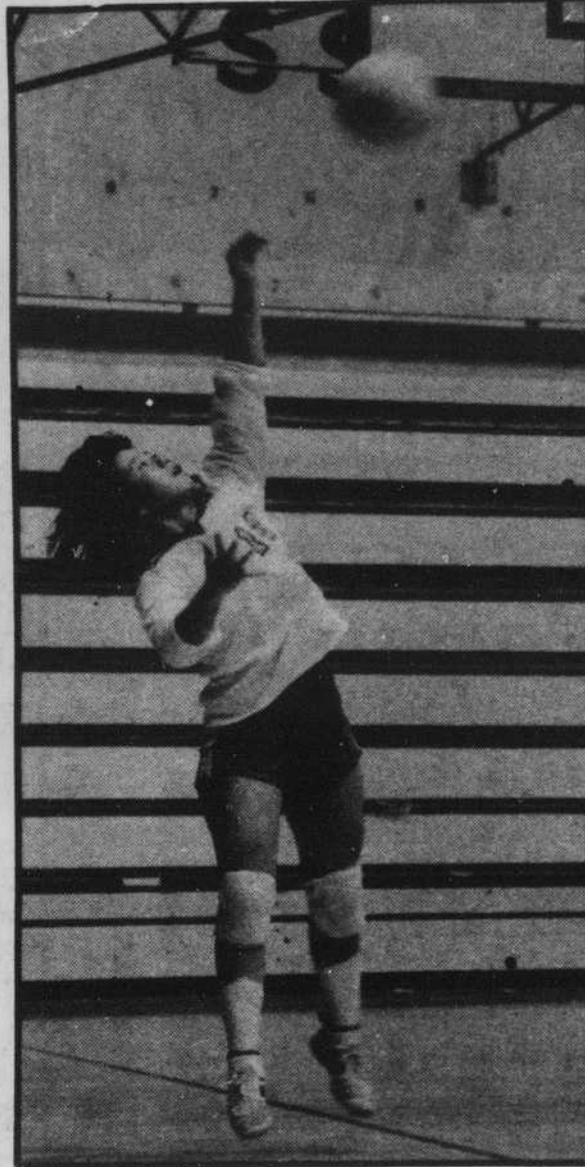
During a two week try-out period in September Nekota proved that height doesn't necessarily equal athletic ability.

"I thought that college volleyball would be harder than high school. The players are even better than the players on USVBA (U.S. Volleyball Association) team that I played on at the national championships in 1977," Nekota said.

Voelz was impressed by Nekota's hustle and desire. "She moved through all the workouts with real desire," recalled Voelz. "Michelle obviously had good basic skills and not big weaknesses."



Michelle Nekota, at 5'1" is too small to be a hitter or a blocker, but is quarterbacking the volleyball team from the setter position. Coach Chris Voelz says height isn't everything. "Michelle leads with her



Photos by Patrick Sullivan

ses. She sets the ball where we want it."

Nekota came to Voelz's attention after the Oregon coach had sent letters to scores of high school seniors interested in college volleyball.

"I knew the volleyball program would be good," said Nekota, referring to the University team. But why Oregon?

"Well, my Dad graduated from the U of O. He swam on the varsity

team for four years. Besides, I just wanted to get away from Hawaii," she says.

Nekota has been successful at volleyball since the sixth grade — except her high school team which "wasn't very good."

Playing in a parks and recreation league in the Honolulu area, Nekota and her teammates won the Oahu championship four years in a row. During her three years of high school play she also

hands. There's no doubt she's in charge." Nekota comes to Oregon from Honolulu, where she played on a recreational team that went to the U.S. Volleyball Association national tournament.

competed at night in city leagues, often playing against women from the University of Hawaii, one of the nation's top teams.

Then she played on the USVBA national tournament team. The team — Lokahi of Honolulu — won its league title and advanced to the nationals in Hilo, Hawaii, before losing in the first round.

"Michelle plays to the level around her," explains Voelz. "I didn't know if she would project

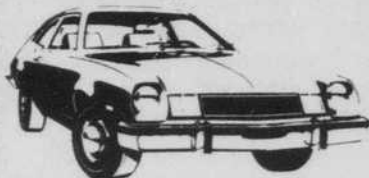
her leadership, but she knows the game well enough to do just that."

So Nekota sets up her teammates for crowd-pleasing spikes, content in the knowledge that she is contributing to a total team effort, an idea Voelz promotes intensely.

"I like and respect talent," says Voelz. "I have my most reliable players starting, and that's why Michelle is in there. She does her job."

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