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Folkl: 2000 Olympics a possibility

Continued from Page 7

recruiting process, but quickly narrowed her choices to Stanford, UCLA and Texas.

"My first priority was to go somewhere with a good academic reputation, and all three satisfied that," she says. "My next set of criteria was that they had both a competitive volleyball and basketball team."

The eventual winner of four years of Folkl's services says that her recruitment was more challenging than that of the average athlete.

"Being a two-sport athlete made the recruiting process more difficult," Stanford head coach Don Shaw says. "Your recruiting competition is not just the top volleyball programs in the country, but also the top basketball programs, and that makes things a little more intense."

Once she chose Stanford, adjusting to the rigors of a student athlete's daily schedule began to take its toll.

"It was hard at times," Folkl says. "With sports being so physically demanding, sometimes you just don't have the go-power to stay up until two every morning doing work."

"It's not easy, but because I like to learn and I like to play sports, you learn to accommodate them both."

After winning a national volleyball championship and helping the basketball team to a Final Four appearance her freshman season, Folkl joined the U.S. Volleyball team that went 14-1 on its Grand Prix tour in the fall of 1995.

"That was a very eye-opening experience," she says. "I had never been exposed to playing sports in an atmosphere that was so intense. It was a little intimidating."

Folkl also got used to being, by far, the youngest member of a team she would rejoin as an alternate on the 1996 U.S. Olympic Team.

"There was a pretty significant

Kristin Folkl File



WHO: Stanford Cardinal outside hitter Kristin Folkl

HOMETOWN: St. Louis, Mo.

STATS: Three-time All-American... alternate on 1996 U.S. Olympic Team...two Final Four appearances in basketball

age difference and that's socially sometimes hard to deal with," she says. "They'd want to go out to a bar and I'd be like, 'I just got my license two years ago!'"

"It was hard at times, but I really feel like I grew a lot from that experience."

Oregon head coach Cathy Nelson has noticed the improvements in Folkl's game that have come from experiences like those with the national team.

"She was always a great net player," Nelson says. "But what's startling is how much she's improved in her defense and her passing."

After returning to the Stanford team last season in time to earn first-team All-Pac-10 and second-team All-American honors, Folkl faced the difficult task of choosing between the Olympic Team and the Stanford basketball squad, which would again reach the Final Four.

"It was hard to leave behind my teammates because I felt like I was sacrificing one for the other," she says. "But I don't regret the decision I made."

In choosing the national team, Folkl again faced the adversities posed by international competition.

"As we got closer and closer to

the Olympics and they started to make cuts, the intensity just went through the roof," she says. "It's something that I'm glad I got a chance to do."

Folkl returned to collegiate volleyball full-time last season and was named second team All-American as a player and as a student, amazing for a player who her coach says is still improving.

"A lot of times she gets by on her physical abilities and her intelligence," Shaw says, "but she's not the most fluid or highly skilled player."

"But although she may not be the best volleyball player, she's probably the best athlete we've ever had."

Strong praise from a coach who has directed seven Pacific-10 Conference champions and three national champions in 13 years as a head coach or co-coach.

"She's got a combination of size, strength and quickness that a lot of people just don't have," Shaw says. "Not only does she jump well, but she's explosive. It doesn't take her very long to get off the ground."

So what's next for one of the most highly decorated two-sport athletes in NCAA history?

"I'm trying to keep my options open," Folkl says. "I don't know which sport I want to pursue, or in what capacity. I'm focusing more on getting through this season and getting through basketball season."

"Then, maybe a few months before school gets out, I'll get my future together."

And the idea of playing both volleyball and basketball at the 2000 Olympics?

"That's something I've thought about," she says. "I have no idea if that's feasible, but in a perfect world, I might try it."

And for a competitor who has tried and succeeded at every level she's played at, the odds are she will.

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