

Fresh: Runge excited about freshmen

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"We thought we would be able to bring both [Wolvert] and Bri along a lot slower than we are," Runge says. "but I think Bri, obviously, is playing when she gets in there and doing a great job."

While Meharry was expected to make some sort of an impact early and earn some substantial playing time, the 6-3 Wolvert, from Camas, Wash., has been more of a surprise.

Earning a starting assignment in four of the Ducks' past five games, Wolvert has officially taken over the center spot vacated by Mowe. She has averaged 10.2 points and 4.6 rebounds over those past five games, including season-highs of eight rebounds against Kansas and 16 points against California last Friday.

"Angelina is probably our most athletic, physically strong player we have in the post and so she's the heir apparent there," Runge says. "Athletically, she is very gifted and that's really helping her make the transition."

Wolvert has shown flashes of brilliance with a variety of strong moves to the hoop and appears to become more comfortable every time she steps out on the court.

"[Against Kansas] was the first time I played where I knew what I was doing, and I could do something with it," Wolvert says. "It's not like I was just thinking 'you have to do this, you have to do this, now you have to do this'. It was more like I just know what I'm doing. I'm a lot more comfortable."

Meharry, for one, has been impressed with not only the way Wolvert has played, but also with how she has responded to the difficult task of trying to replace a player like Mowe.

"Angelina is playing great right now," Meharry says. "I think that with Jenny gone, a lot of the pressure has been put on her as one of the big players inside and she's handled it very, very well. You can tell that when you watch the game."

Meharry and Wolvert are receiving the playing time and recognition now, but Runge is also excited about the other members of this freshmen class, most notably guards Lindsey Dion and Karen Piers and redshirt freshman Shannon Thorne.

"I think the other freshmen are real close to breaking through that barrier," Runge said before last week's trip to the Bay Area. "I think Shannon's doing very, very well and is real close to breaking into getting some playing time, as is Lindsey Dion."

"I think one of the things that keeps them from getting that time is how well Lisa [Bowyer], Nat [Hughes] and Nicole [Strange] are playing right now. I think in big games when we haven't had much of a margin to substitute a

The freshman class

■ **BRIANNE MEHARRY:** A 6-1 forward who won four straight state titles from the famed Oregon City High School. The Gladstone native is leading the team in scoring (13.4 per game) and total rebounds with 55.

■ **ANGELINA WOLVERT:** A 6-3 power forward from Camas, Wash., who has been equally as impressive as Meharry in her first season. In Pac-10 play, she is second on the team in points, averaging 12.5 per game.

■ **LINDSEY DION:** She has played considerable less time than Wolvert or Meharry, averaging just 6.5 minutes per game. But when on the floor, Dion's tenacity and aggressive play are easy to spot.

■ **KAREN PIERS:** Stuck behind starting point guard Natalie Hughes, Piers has played just 71 minutes this season. Runge said she is reluctant to throw a freshman in at a position that commands so much leadership, but is excited about Piers' potential.

■ **CAMBER ELINGSON AND RE SHAWN LEWIS:** As walk-ons, the two freshman have yet to play in a regular season game, but have been playing well in practice, Runge said.

lot, that's where they've been kept on the bench because of the consistent play of those players, not [because of] their ability to play."

Dion, from Fresno, Calif., has seen limited playing time but got the breakthrough Runge predicted in the Ducks' win over California and was a bright spot coming off the bench as she provided nine points and five rebounds in 17 minutes, all career highs.

Piers, a 5-7 point guard from Truro, Nova Scotia, has the misfortune of being stuck behind Hughes, who is second on the team in scoring with 13.3 points per game and leads the team in minutes played with 31.5 per outing.

"I think Karen is going to be a good player in our program," Runge says. "I think her confidence is not great right now, and I think throwing a point guard into the fire is a little bit different than throwing a post player in, where they have to handle the pressure right on the front line and be responsible for running the offense and not just their own job."

Piers says she understands the situation and takes it all in stride.

"It's understandable because [the guards] are so good," she says. "It's going to make me better, playing against players [in practice] who are so good."

Rounding out the freshmen

class are walk-ons ReShawn Lewis from Portland and Camber Ellingson from Baker.

Although they have yet to play in a game, Runge says: "Camber and ReShawn are doing a great job for us as well, doing a great job in practice, learning things and becoming better players themselves."

There are a lot of differences between the high school and Division I college game, differences that can sometimes be too much for freshmen to handle, but Runge says this class is handling the changes, both on and off the court, just fine.

"I think everything is different," she says. "I don't think there are very many things that are the same. The focus that's required, the commitment that's required, the preparation and the level of complexity of offenses and defenses — I think a lot of things are very, very different from high school."

"I think it's very overwhelming. I think it really takes them to a place sometimes where they wonder how much did they know about basketball before they came here," she adds. "... I think they've adjusted well, in particular Angelina and Bri."

There are also tremendous changes off the floor, including new surroundings, new friends, classes that are substantially tougher than in high school as well as the good and bad that goes along with the freedom of living away from home for the first time.

Wolvert, though, says it hasn't been that big of a deal.

"I don't think anything really changes, just your parents aren't there to tell you to go to bed at 9," she says. "Basketball-wise, the only thing that's really changed is that you have to give 100 percent 100 percent of the time because if you don't you lose games. In high school you could give 100 percent 20 percent of the time and you'll win the games."

One of the things perhaps making the transition relatively smooth for this freshmen class is the closeness they have developed off the court.

"As a group, we're really close," Wolvert says. "We spend a lot of time with each other, and we stick by each other a lot."

"We go to movies, we rent movies, just the usual hangout stuff," Dion says. "We go to the mall. Just normal stuff, nothing abstract. We just enjoy each other's company."

Wolvert, for one, wouldn't have it any other way.

"I really like our freshmen class. I'm really glad that the freshmen that we have here are here."

If this class continues to grow and develop the potential it has briefly displayed thus far, Oregon fans will be very glad that this class is here as well.

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