

Sports

Verhoeven vexes volleyball foes

By BEAU DURE

Jon Wilson, the Duke head volleyball coach, does not rank his recruiting trip to meet Amy Verhoeven among his favorite driving experiences.

"It was the middle of June, about 100 degrees out ... and I blew a tire," he said. "So I got out to change the tire, and I just got completely drenched. I was soaked. So I took off my shirt, laid it over a seat and aimed all the air-conditioning jets at it.

"By the time I got there, my shirt was dry and I was completely exhausted. But the interview went well, and Amy wound up coming to Duke."

Wilson now laughs heartily while describing his driving ordeal because Verhoeven, a sophomore psychology major from Lafayette, Indiana, has quickly developed into a powerful weapon on a team that has started strongly this fall.

"I liked everything I saw about her," Wilson said. "She's a tall and thin kid, but she has good strength for her size. Every time I watched her, the more I liked her."

When Verhoeven visited Duke, she was impressed by the mix-



DUKE SPORTS INFORMATION PHOTO

Amy Verhoeven

ture of academics, athletics and atmosphere.

"I really enjoyed my recruiting visit," Verhoeven said. "I liked both coaches and the team very well. I wanted to go to a good academic school as well as a good volleyball program."

Verhoeven selected Duke over Notre Dame and Rice.

"It wasn't that big of a battle to get her [to Duke]," Wilson said. "Usually someone that talented is."

Verhoeven, a second-team All-Atlantic Coast Conference pick last year, has already surpassed lofty expectations and currently leads the ACC with a .365 kill percentage through Sept. 24.

She has also switched positions this year, moving to outside hitter from middle blocker. The switch gives Verhoeven more kill opportunities and utilizes her 6-2 height to create mismatches at the net.

"I've enjoyed the switch from middle to outside because it gives me more of an opportunity to use my height to hit over the blockers," Verhoeven said.

"She gets more swings out

there by the way the game is played," Wilson said.

Verhoeven first made the switch last fall to replace Sylvia Thomson (now graduated), who had been injured late in the season.

"[Verhoeven] played a good ACC tournament, having really only played outside for three matches," Wilson said. "It was at that time that we realized how good she could be out there if she played there full-time.

"We saw the talent that she had to make that switch, and I actually think it's a more natural position for her."

Verhoeven also played outside hitter for the gold medal-winning North team at the U.S. Olympic Festival this summer, playing with and against players from top college programs.

"[Olympic Festival competition] helped me a lot," Verhoeven said. "The people that I played with were a whole level higher than what I'd been used to. It was good to get experience with those type players."

The experience of Olympic Festival competition and one stand-out season in the ACC give Verhoeven leadership credentials on a young but talented Duke team. The Blue Devils include a first-year starter at setter and two freshmen among a seven player starting rotation.

"I feel like I have more responsibility [this year] when I go out on the court," Verhoeven said.

Verhoeven has also surprised her coaches with her rapid skill development, especially on defense. She has averaged 1.65 digs per game this season through Sept. 22.

"Her back row has really improved a lot," Wilson said. "I didn't expect her to be this solid in the back row until her junior year. I think she surprised every-

body but herself. We don't have to take her out in the back row."

The one skill Verhoeven is still developing is blocking. She is averaging 0.51 blocks per game.

"She's an adequate blocker, but she should be a dominant blocker," Wilson said. "But blocking is always the last skill to develop in just about anybody. For

most people it's a two to three year process to make them good blockers."

Fortunately for Wilson and the Duke team, Verhoeven has plenty of time to learn.

"She's just been a great asset to the program," Wilson said. "I'm just really excited that she's got two more years to go."

Today

Women's Soccer vs. N.C. Wesleyan, Duke Soccer Stadium, 4:00 p.m.

Field Hockey vs. Wake Forest, West Campus Field, 4:00 p.m.

Men's Soccer vs. N.C. Wesleyan, Duke Soccer Stadium, 7:00 p.m.