

Loyola's big man puts up big numbers

Sophomore Nick Olson, the Men's Volleyball team reclaim No. 1 spot

By Joe Flaherty

Published 2/11/14

He stands 6-foot-10. He reaches 11 feet and 8 inches high. No, I'm not talking about Kevin Durant or LeBron James. I'm talking about sophomore [Nick Olson](#), middle hitter for Loyola's, once again, [top-ranked](#) Men's Volleyball team.

By age 16, he had already grown to the height he stands at today. He had used that height to his advantage throughout middle school, becoming a standout for his school's volleyball, basketball and track and field teams.

He primarily got involved with sports so he could spend more time with his friends, but it was only a matter of time before he started hearing that his talent could possibly land him college scholarships.

As he entered his freshman year at Eisenhower High School in New Berlin, Wis., he was forced to make a difficult decision about his future on the hardwood: Would he be taking shots at a net, or would he be spiking balls over one?

"I made the decision not to play basketball," Olson said. "I just liked volleyball more and thought I was better at it, so I started focusing on that. I kind of regretted that, but I don't see it as regret any more."

Olson's recent play shows no signs of regret. As the anchor of the team's defense, he has contributed to a team-high 51 blocks and has already taken home Midwest Intermural Volleyball Association (MIVA) Defensive Player of the Week honors two times this season.

Prior to Olson's arrival, the Ramblers lacked a towering net presence on defense. Head Coach [Shane Davis](#) immediately identified Olson's height as a huge asset during the recruiting process.

"We were traditionally an undersized team with good ball control and we served really well," Davis said. "But we really needed to add the 'volleyball size' type of guys that are just big. Olson had that size early in his career. Whether or not he was progressing quickly or slowly, it didn't really matter to us because of his size."

Davis continued his pursuit of Olson while also recruiting his club volleyball teammates Trevor Novotny and Peter Hutz. Olson narrowed down his list of potential schools to University of California at Los Angeles, University of Southern California and Loyola. In the end, it was one of Davis' traits that tipped the scales in favor of the Ramblers.

"I didn't see him as a coach; I saw him as my friend," Olson said. "He'd call and say, 'What's going on Nick? Have you made a decision?' He was really personable."

Fittingly, Olson was reunited with his friends Novotny and Hutz thanks to a new friend, Davis, all while playing a sport he picked up just to be around his friends more often.

Since arriving on campus his freshman year, Olson has made all but four starts for the team at middle hitter. That experience, as well as additional time with Assistant Coach Mark Hulse, has helped make defense more instinctual.

“[Hulse] knows his stuff, he’s the guy who really helped me the most in becoming the blocker I am,” Olson said. “Now I’m really focused on making correct, efficient moves. I’m not trying to juke myself out or guess, I’m really trying to make it as simple and as fast as I possibly can.”

But Olson’s defensive prowess is only half the story. He is also Loyola’s most efficient attacker, racking up a team-leading .579 hitting percentage on 68 kills.

It comes as no surprise that he credits one of his friends as a reason for his success.

“Peter [Hutz] does a great job at setting me in good situations,” Olson said. “I go in with the mindset that I’m going to kill every ball. I usually get the perfect-situation sets, which makes it a lot easier to get a kill.”

Davis sees his efficiency on offense as Olson’s biggest improvement.

“In the past he’d make errors, but now he’s just swinging for the court,” Davis said. “So even if he doesn’t get kills, he’s forcing the other team to beat him, or at least dig him. And a lot of times they’re just not digging him. I’d love to set him more.”

With Olson becoming a lethal force on offense, he provides yet another matchup for the Ramblers to exploit on a nightly basis.

“It’s kind of a setter’s dream right now,” Davis said with a smile.

Olson says there’s no secret formula to continuing that dream scenario. It all comes down to working hard and tuning out distractions, of which there are plenty now that the Ramblers have secured the nation’s top rank.

But staying focused is no chore for Olson. All it takes is a little self-reflection.

“You just have to take the time to remember where you came from,” Olson said. “I’m just that kid from New Berlin, Wis., who just liked to play with his friends. Now I’m here.”

Olson and the Ramblers will try to extend their seven-match winning streak as they head out west for back-to-back matchups against Grand Canyon University this Friday and Saturday.