Know Time!

Pandas grad Jen Telfer makes impact as a coach

“NEVER say never. I know that’s cliché, but if you would have told 17-year-old me that I would have the opportunity to play in Europe and would become a coach, I wouldn’t have believed it or thought it possible. I’ve done a lot of things I thought I’d never do and a lot of things that were once very far outside my comfort zone.

“Opportunities arise when you work hard and are willing to put yourself out there.”

Telfer’s trail
Athlete
High school: Edmonton Jasper Place
Club: Alberta 18U, 2000
Alberta, 2001 Canada Winter Games
College: Grande Prairie Wolves, 1999-01
University: Alberta Pandas, 2001-04
Professional: Engelhoms Volley, Sweden, 2005-10

Coach
High school: Spruce Grove Comp Panthers, assistant
Club: Pandas Volleyball Club
Zone 6, Alberta Winter Games
Alberta, 2005 Canada Winter Games
College: Edmonton King’s University Eagles
University: Alberta Pandas, assistant 2010-11
Personal coach: ASPIRE Volleyball training
Volleyball Canada Centre of Excellence junior high
Playing overseas an eye-opener

“As a player, I did not have a coaches perspective until much later in my career. I really credit Laurie Eisler and the U of A coaching staff who really taught me about using and executing a game plan. At university I learned to be a student of the game and really understand how to read and see plays develop.

“I didn’t realize how much I had grown in that aspect until I went to play overseas and was shocked that teammates of the same experience level did not have that ability.

“Athletes who have physical attributes that give them an advantage in sports, or who have a so-called natural talent for specific skills, often don’t have to put a lot of work in to learn skills and sometimes have difficulties breaking down skills to teach them.

“I taught a blocking clinic with a 6-7 friend who had no concept of teaching movement outside of the small shuffle steps he needed to perform a block in his context as a player. It took him awhile to learn how to teach movement to kids that didn’t have the advantages that he has as a blocker.

“I have a decent base of athleticism, but I always have had to work hard to learn and become proficient in skills. That helped in understanding how to teach skills to developing athletes. But at the same time, I am constantly learning and growing my knowledge on the game. Coaches need to be able to understand all positions in the sport and how they fit into different systems and strategies. You don’t always learn the whole picture simply by playing the game.”

Advice for high school athletes

“By the age of 15, most female athletes are physiologically and psychologically prepared to specialize in their sport of choice and start to specialize in positioning as well.

“Athletes can still compete in 1-2 additional sports even when they start to specialize, but it is important that their other pursuits be complementary. For example, volleyball athletes whose main competitive season is during the club season of January-May, would likely select a summer sport like soccer or track and field to complement their existing training.

“Athletes can compete during the volleyball season in another sport, but they would need to select a team and sport that still allowed them to train for volleyball as their first priority. I’ve coached high school athletes who have been able to navigate a high school basketball season while playing club volleyball, but they need to have coaches that are flexible and understand the demands on their time for both sports.

“Every athlete’s journey will be different and there is no one definite pathway to be successful. Where you have issues come up are athletes specializing early in sports when they are still developing — 15 and younger — that can be limiting.”

‘The biggest thing I look for’

“Wins and losses are such a dangerous thing to judge yourself by as a coach. I’ve never really used those as a benchmark, but certainly there have been losses that were hard to take and wins that were special to remember.

“The biggest thing I look for is athlete growth and experience. If my players are learning, enjoying themselves and continue on in volleyball I see that as a success. More recently I have been working on how I engage with my athletes and connect with them as individuals. My goal is to have players that feel comfortable communicating with me on a regular basis and to find ways for them to be successful in their specific role on the team.

“It always feels good when a former athlete makes a point to come say hi and see how I’m doing. I really just hope to be a positive part of their growth as a player and to aid in their journey, no matter where it may take them.”
Pounding out the hits
Three Pandas are in their first year of university eligibility:

**Tessa Hill — Calgary OH Arts**
2015-16: Season-ending knee injury, Pandas’ opening weekend
2015: Canadian national junior development team
National U18 championship, second
Western Canada Summer Games, second
2014: Canadian U17 championship, first, national all-star, Jr. Dinos
Canadian U18 beach championship, first
2013: U16 provincial beach championship, first
Alberta Volleyball Association 16U female athlete of the year, Canuck Stuff
2012: Alberta Winter Games

**Jessica Hoskins — Edmonton M Physical Ed & Recreation**
2015-16: Fourteen matches played with Pandas, seventh in team scoring
2015: Trained in Japan with five other Pandas
2014-15: Red shirt with Pandas

**Mary Pless — Edmonton OH Science**
2015-16: Six matches played with Pandas
2015: Western Canada Summer Games, second
Canadian national junior development team
2014: National Team Challenge Cup, first