



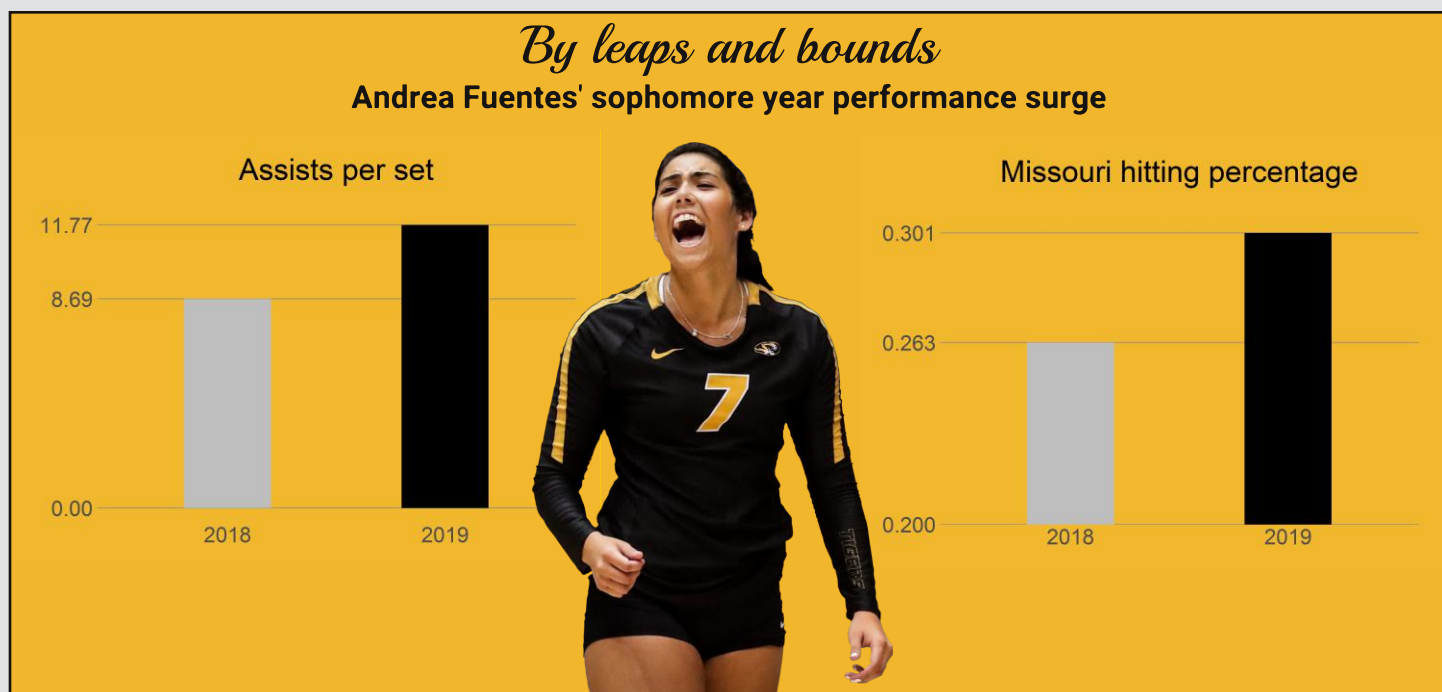
**An offensive juggernaut** University of Missouri's Andrea Fuentes (left, San Juan) and Kylie Deberg (Iowa) were one of the most exciting setter-OH duos in 2019. Throughout the season, Fuentes dished out an SEC-leading 1,306 assists, averaging 11.77 per set (5th in NCAA Division I) while running a Tigers offense that hit for a 0.301 hitting percentage, 4th in the country. Meanwhile the 6'4 Deberg, a WWE fan, laid the smackdown on opposing defenses, tallying 524 kills at a 4.72 per set clip (#1 in the SEC), ranking in the country's top 20 in both categories. (Photos: Mizzou Athletics).

## A superlative offense

**T**he college volleyball world probably started paying a little more attention to Missouri Tigers **Andrea Fuentes** (San Juan), a redshirt freshman in 2018, and Kylie Deberg, a sophomore, after the then-unranked Tigers went to Gainesville, Florida on an October Sunday in 2018 and defeated the 11th-ranked Florida Gators in 5 sets. Fuentes dished out what was then a career-high 47 assists, while Deberg established a personal best of her own with 21 kills, 5 of them in the decisive set. Up until that point, about two thirds of the way into the season, Missouri had gone unranked in the AVCA poll, but

they were in it, at 24th, when it was released the very next day, and they would remain in the poll for the rest of the year. The Tigers are no strangers to upsets. At the NCAA Division I Tournament the previous year, they upset former Big 12 foe Kansas, ranked 19th in the country at the time, and then punched their ticket to the Sweet 16 by beating host Wichita State, #16 in the country at the time.

The following Sunday, Fuentes tallied 61 assists in a five-set victory against Texas A&M. Molly Kreklow, a 2018 volunteer assistant coach with the Tigers at the time, had been the last Missouri player



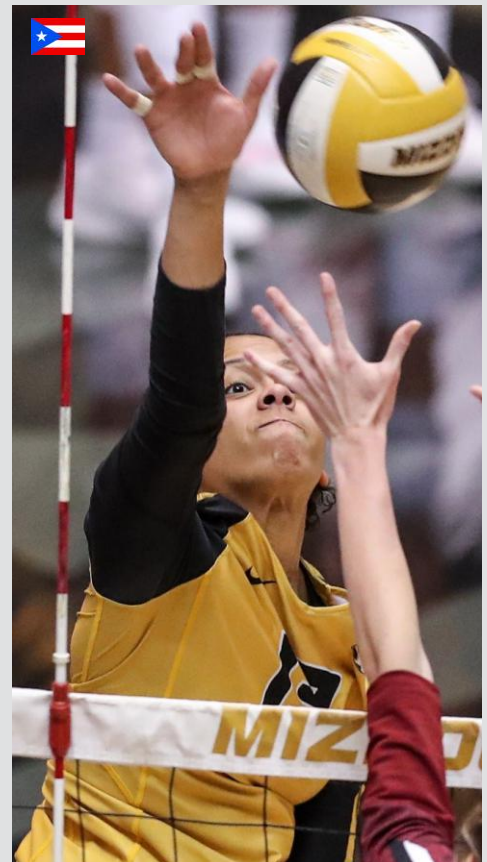
**A quantum leap** Besides dramatically improving her individual numbers, going from 1,026 to 1,306 assists and from 8.69 assists per set to 11.77 (5th in the country), Andrea Fuentes guided the Missouri offense to a 0.301 hitting percentage, 4th best in the country, second-best in program history, and almost 40 points better than the previous year. (Photo: Mizzou Athletics)

to top 60 assists in a match, dishing out 62 of them during a November 2010 contest, almost 8 years prior. Fuentes was named SEC Freshman of the Week in consecutive weeks, and was a 2018 SEC All-Freshman Team selection. Teammate and fellow San Juan native **Dariana Hollingsworth**, who places her shots so artfully that even if she were to tell her opponents where she intends to hit the ball, they probably still couldn't get there in time, was a 2018 All-SEC selection. Deberg was cast into the national spotlight when she received an AVCA Honorable Mention All-America distinction. The Tigers offense improved significantly, from hitting for a 0.244 hitting percentage, 55th in the country in 2017, to 0.261, 21st in the country in 2018. The Tigers' campaign ended in the second round of the NCAA Tournament in Lincoln, Nebraska, at the hands of the 7th-ranked Nebraska Cornhuskers, who enjoyed the home court advantage provided by 8,000-plus Big Red fans and took the match in the minimum number of sets.

In 2019, both Fuentes and Deberg cemented their status as bonafide standouts, with Fuentes named the SEC Player of the Week three times and Deberg

twice. Fuentes received national attention of her own when she was named the AVCA Division I National Player of the Week on December the 3rd, while the AVCA upgraded Deberg at season's end from Honorable Mention All-America in 2018 to Second Team All-America in 2019. Both of them, along with junior middle blocker Tyanna Omazic, a deadly slide hitter who, along with Deberg, transferred to Mizzou from the University of Illinois, were All-SEC selections. The Tigers' offense reached some lofty heights, too, ranking 4th in the country in hitting percentage with 0.301, second-best in the history of the program, and 5th in kills per set with 14.67. Hollingsworth and Omazic, in particular, saw their hitting percentage numbers skyrocket, the former going from 0.251 to 0.317, and Omazic from 0.253 to an astonishing 0.386 hitting percentage, a 0.133 improvement that placed her 2nd in the SEC and 29th in the whole country. Deberg's efficiency made a quantum leap of its own, going from 0.214 to 0.281, which translated into almost 100 more kills. Fuentes herself was 5th in the country in assists per set with 11.77, and her 1,306 assists led the SEC. Missouri was able to upset #13 Michigan early on in the





**These are a few of Fuentes' favorite targets** The Ozarks were alive with the sound of these three attackers smacking the ball in 2019. Left: The Croatian Sensation Tyanna Omazic (left), a 2019 All-SEC selection with a lethal slide attack, led the team in hitting percentage with 0.386. Center: Nigerian-American Leketor Member-Meneh, she of the astonishing leaping ability and a 2018 All-SEC selection, tallied 340 kills in 2019. Right: Fuentes' fellow San Juan native Dariana Hollingsworth, a crafty attacker and 2018 All-SEC selection, was second in the team in hitting percentage with 0.317. (Photos: Mizzou Athletics)

season, and played in some extremely contested matches against teams ranked much higher than themselves, like Baylor, Hawaii, and Florida, but was on the wrong end of an upset, too, when it fell at home in 4 sets to the unranked University of Mississippi Rebels, a.k.a. Ole Miss.

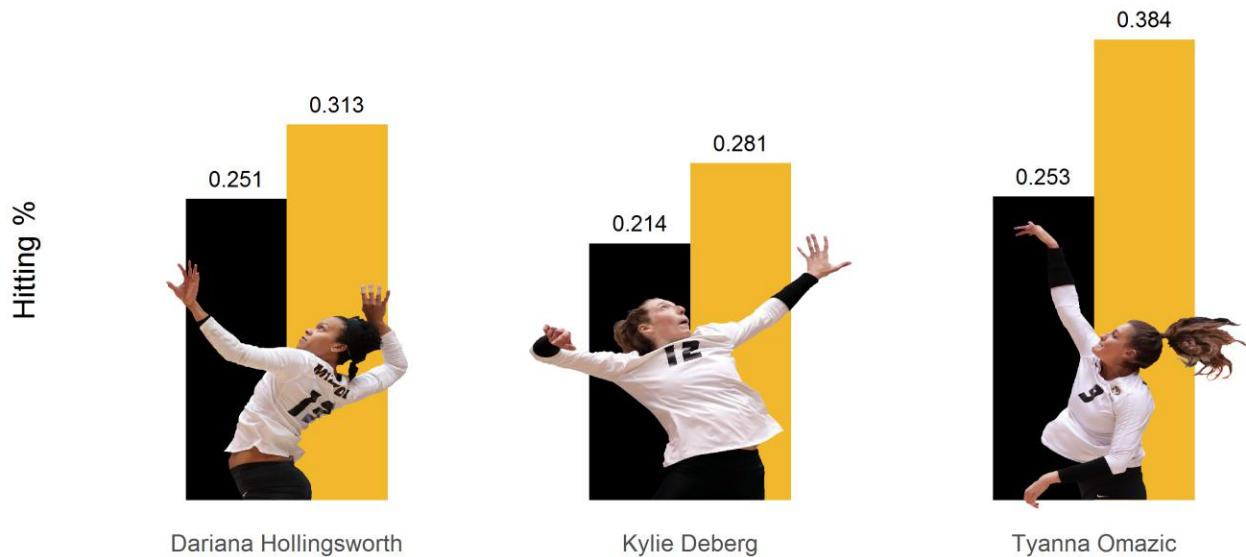
Also, they have a tendency to lose large leads when playing highly ranked opponents. The Kentucky Wildcats, who have emerged as an SEC powerhouse, swept the Tigers in both of their matches in 2019. In the first Kentucky match, playing at home, the Tigers were up in each set by at least 4 points before the Wildcats would mount a comeback and take it. In the first set, Mizzou was ahead 20-16 but ultimately conceded it 27-29. In 2020, again playing at home against UK, the Tigers took the first set and were up 10-3 in the second stanza before, once again, Kentucky came back to

take the set 33-35. This probably shouldn't happen to an elite team playing at home. Another example: The 2019 season ended in the same place and NCAA Tournament round and at the hands of the same opponents as did the 2018 season. This time the Tigers proved to be an extremely tough out, with the third set going into the thirties before Nebraska was able to take it, and eventually the match, in four. After splitting the first two sets, Missouri was up 11-6 in that third set before the Cornhuskers scored 8 points in a row. Much easier said than done, of course, but the Tigers could make things much more interesting if they could figure out a way to keep the foot on the pedal and close the door when they are ahead by a large margin, especially late in a set, and especially against top-ranked opponents. If they could manage that, they would probably have a good shot at making a deep run in the national tournament.

# Three Effective Tigers

Hollingsworth, Deberg, and Omazic saw their hitting percentage numbers skyrocket in 2019

2018 2019



**Three reasons why** Hollingsworth, Deberg, and Omazic were three big reasons why Missouri's hitting percentage went from 0.263, 21st in the country in 2018, to 0.301, 4th in the country in 2019. (Photos: Mizzou Athletics)

2019 also saw the arrival on campus of freshman **Leandra Mangual** (Río Grande), a 6'1 player who bravely took on the role of libero even though she had never played the position before. Mangual was the team libero for the first 13 matches of the season before switching to a defensive specialist role coming off the bench. She had a season-high 23 digs in a 5-set match against the University of Hawai'i and tallied 207 digs in 2019, playing in every set throughout.

## The Kreklows

One could take a generous view of the 1990's Missouri Tigers volleyball teams and say they had difficulty in finding the road to success. Missouri enjoyed exactly one winning season (1992) in a decade that included an especially challenging 1996 campaign in which the Tigers won not a single match, posting an 0-28 record (although they did push 4 teams to 5 sets). Meanwhile, about a mile up

North College Road, Susan and Wayne Kreklow spent the decade building an NAIA powerhouse at Columbia College. The Cougars won over 90% of their matches between 1995 and 1997. In 1998 and 1999, they were undefeated, winning 85 matches in a row and the national title both years. In the Kreklows' ten-year tenure, starting in 1990, the Cougars posted a 0.841 winning percentage.

In the year 2000, the Kreklows moved their operation down the road and took charge of the neighbors' volleyball program, which had finished 9-21 the year prior, 9th in the Big 12 Conference. With Susan Kreklow at the helm, the Tigers dramatically turned things around, posting a 24-7 record, finishing 2nd in the Big 12, and making their first-ever trip to the NCAA Tournament. Not surprisingly, Kreklow was named the Big 12 Coach of the Year. Missouri would go on to the Tournament the next 7 years in a row, too, a run that included a 2005 Elite Eight appearance, their best





Against Nebraska in the 2nd round of the 2019 NCAA Tournament Above Left: Fuentes has the Cornhuskers *right* where she wants 'em. Above Right: Hollingsworth sticks it to Big Red. Below: A trio of Tigers doing their thing. The Tigers took a set from Big Red and pushed another into the thirties before losing the match in 4. (Photos: Mizzou Athletics)







**Fearless frosh** Leandra Mangual (Río Grande) took over the reins at libero in 2019, even though she came in as an outside hitter and had never played the position before. Mangual collected 207 digs throughout the season, including a season-high 23 digs in a 5-set match against the University of Hawai'i. (Photos: Mizzou Athletics)







**Setter wisdom** Fuentes receives guidance from assistant coach and former Mizzou star setter Molly Taylor. In 2013, Taylor, then known as Molly Kreklow, led the Tigers offense to a 0.356 hitting percentage, best in the country and best-ever in program history. Led by Fuentes, the 2019 Tigers' 0.301 hitting percentage was fourth-best in NCAA Division I and second only to Taylor's 2013 Tigers in program history. (Photo: Mizzou Athletics)

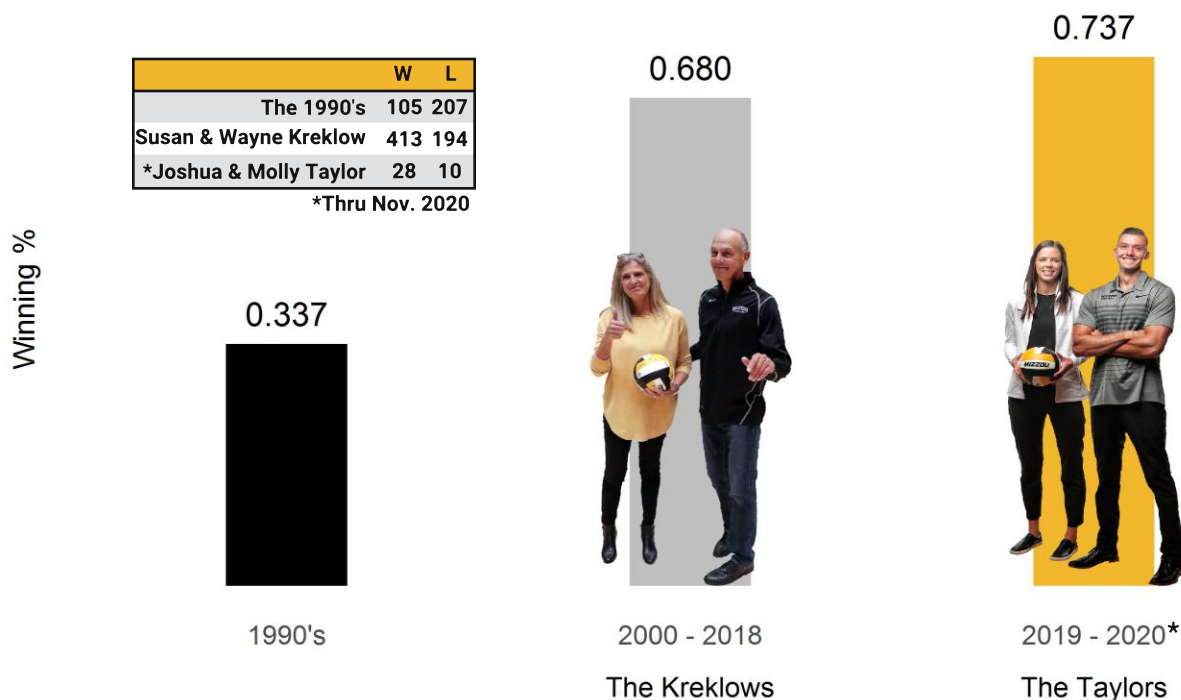
result so far in the postseason. That year marked the debut of Wayne Kreklow as head volleyball coach, and he would remain in charge for the rest of the Kreklows' time at Mizzou. In 2013, a year after their move to the SEC, the Tigers finished the regular season with a perfect record: 34-0, winning the SEC regular season title for the first time. They would win it a second time, in 2016, sharing it with the Florida Gators. In their 19-year tenure, from 2000 to 2018, the Kreklows posted a 413-194 record (0.680), with only two seasons with a losing record. Mizzou played in the NCAA Tournament fifteen times, reached the Sweet 16 three times, and the Elite Eight once.

## The Taylors

Assistant coach Molly Taylor (née Kreklow), niece of Wayne and Susan Krelow, was a star setter at Mizzou from 2010 to 2013, dishing out 5,366 assists in those 4 years, second all-time in program history. In 2013, she was named an AVCA First Team All-America after conducting the offense of a team that went undefeated (34-0) in the regular season. The Tigers' 0.356 hitting percentage that year led the country by far, and it's the program's best-ever by even farther. In 2014 through 2016, Kreklow played professionally in Germany, Turkey, and Italy. She also played for Team USA in that period, highlighted by her performance at the 2015

## Three Tiger Eras

The nineties, the Kreklows, and the Taylors



**Three Tiger Eras** Head coaches Susan and Wayne Kreklow righted the Tigers' ship in the 2000's, and Joshua and Molly Taylor have kept it in tip-top shape since they took over the reins in 2019. (Photos: Mizzou Athletics)

FIVB World Grand Prix, where the USA won the title and Kreklow was named Best Setter. In 2019, Kreklow was inducted into the University of Missouri Hall of Fame, the fourth Mizzou volleyball player to receive the honor. Meanwhile, future husband and current Missouri head coach Joshua Taylor was a two-time All-America at Pepperdine University in California, where he had 1,433 kills, and represented the United States at the 2016 Pan Am Cup held in Mexico. In 2016, Taylor also played professionally in Finland and Qatar.

The Taylors took a rather circuitous route to the jobs they currently hold. In 2016, they were both hired as graduate assistant coaches at Mizzou, but then both left the program to pursue professional playing opportunities overseas. Then Missouri's assistant coach Dang Yeng left to take the head coaching job at Stetson University in Florida, and

volunteer assistant coach Dewei Shen left as well, so head coach Wayne Kreklow offered their jobs to Joshua and Molly, who, both a little worn out from playing outside the U.S., accepted. In July 2019, Wayne and Susan Kreklow announced their retirements, and Joshua Taylor was named interim head coach, with Molly Taylor as his assistant. In November 2019, Taylor was promoted to full-time head coach, signing a 5-year contract with the Tigers, who posted a 22-8 record and reached the second round of the NCAA Tournament in his first year at the helm. The arrival to the Southeastern Conference of the Taylors and Olympian Kayla Banwarth, who took over the reins at Ole Miss in 2020, along with Top 15 powerhouses Florida and Kentucky, could move the conference a little closer to the college volleyball elite.





Photo: NORCECA

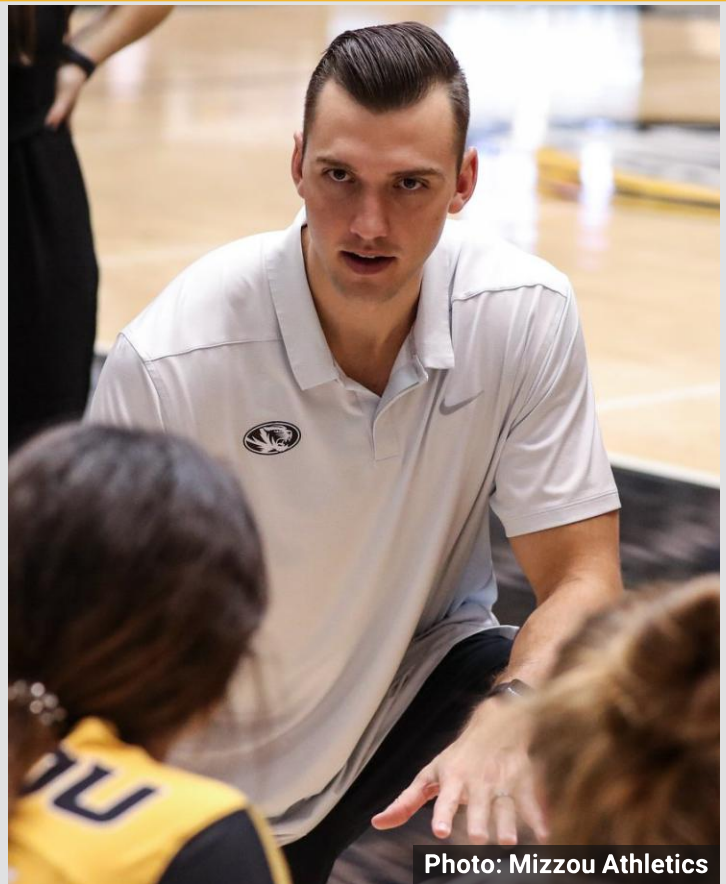


Photo: Mizzou Athletics



Photo: FIVB



Photo: Mizzou Athletics

**The Taylors, then and now** Before taking over the reins at Missouri, head volleyball coach Joshua Taylor and assistant volleyball coach Molly Taylor played professionally overseas and represented the United States in international competition (left column). Molly Taylor was named Best Setter at the 2015 FIVB World Grand Prix, where the U.S. finished in first place. Joshua Taylor represented the U.S. in the 2016 Pan Am Cup and played professionally in Finland and Qatar.





Photo: Mizzou Athletics

**The Kreklows** The arrival of Susan and Wayne Kreklow in 2000 dramatically changed the fortunes of Missouri volleyball, turning a program that had only one winning season in the nineties into an NCAA Tournament fixture. Susan Kreklow was the Tigers' head coach from 2000 to 2004, during which time the Tigers played in the Tournament every year, something they had never done before. In 2005, she swapped roles with husband Wayne, who shared the court with Bird, McHale, and the rest of the gang in the 1980-1981 Boston Celtics in the NBA (below, left). Under Wayne Kreklow, the Tigers reached the Sweet 16 in 2010, 2016, and 2017, the Elite Eight in 2005, and won the regular season SEC championship twice: 2013 and 2016 (below, right).



Photo: iamaceltic.it



Photo: Mizzou Athletics