



Four of a kind, Aces From left to right: freshman Melanie Feliciano (Ponce), who amassed 456 kills (4th among freshmen in NCAA DI) and 289 digs in 2019; Gabriela Macedo (Brazil), who finished 2019 fifth in digs in NCAA DI with 704; Rachel Tam (Hong Kong), holder of Evansville's single-match kills record with 39; and Alondra Vázquez (Toa Alta), a double-double queen who finished her sophomore year with 383 kills and 407 digs. (Photos: University of Evansville).

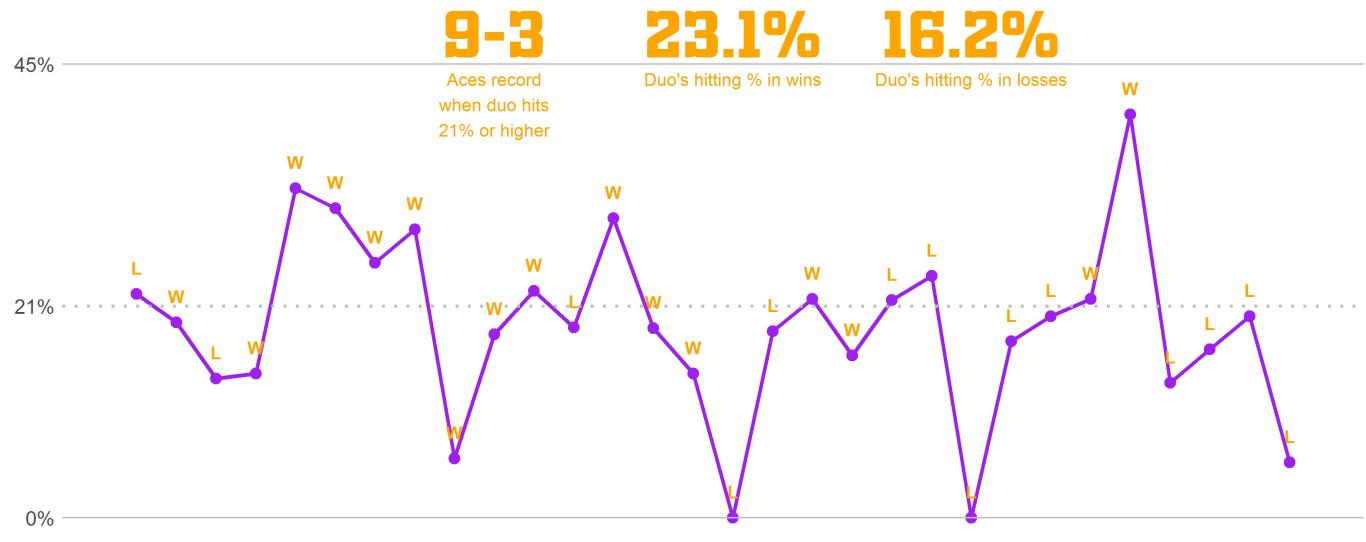
A young dynamic duo emerges in Indiana

The early 2019-2020 college volleyball season was taken by storm by University of Evansville's rookie outside hitter **Melanie Feliciano** (Ponce), who was the Missouri Valley Conference (NCAA Division I) Freshman of the Week in each of the first two weeks of her college career, and 3 out of 4 weeks in September. In her second week, Feliciano was a terror in the offense, amassing 107 kills in a four-match stretch at a clip of 6.69 kills / set while hitting 0.309. The Purple Aces were able to put all 4 matches on the winning column, too. That week, on September 14, 2019, Feliciano collected 29 kills and 9 digs in an early afternoon match against Middle Tennessee State. That was almost an appetizer for the display of

power and skill that would take place in the evening match of that Saturday: 36 kills and 20 digs in a 5-set affair against Eastern Illinois that the Purple Aces were only able to pull out after going extra points in the decisive set. Feliciano's 36 kills were, at the time, a single-match record for Evansville, a mark that was eclipsed a few nights later by her teammate and Hong Kong native Rachel Tam with 39 kills of her own. The 36 kills were also the eighth highest total in the country in a 5-set match in 2019. Only one other player in Division I, Jordan Thompson, of the University of Cincinnati, managed 35 kills and 20 digs in a single match. For a brief shining moment, the young *ponceña* actually led the entire country in kills. The offensive

It pays to be efficient

Feliciano's and Vázquez' combined hitting % and match outcomes



It pays to be efficient The Purple Aces were 9-3 (0.750) when Feliciano and Vázquez combined for a hitting percentage of 0.210 or higher.

triumvirate of Feliciano, fellow Puerto Rican **Alondra Vázquez** (Toa Alta), and Hong Kong native Tam had Valley defenses scrambling for cover all season long. Although slowed down and indeed having to miss a few matches due to injury towards the end of the season, Feliciano still finished in the Top 50 in kills nationwide with 456, the fourth most by a freshman in the country. Feliciano was named to both the All-MVC Second Team and the MVC All-Freshman Team. Volleyball Magazine also gave Feliciano an Honorable Mention in its All-Freshman Team.

Throughout the season, the aforementioned Vázquez put on quite a show of her own, on both offense and defense. The 5'11 outside hitter from Toa Alta collected 17 double-doubles in 30 matches in which she participated, accumulating 383 kills and 407 digs altogether in the season. In some matches, she genuinely seemed to be *everywhere*, frequently getting to the ball and keeping a play alive when it seemed the Aces would have to surrender the point. She had five 10-20 matches and three 20-10 matches, including 29 kills and 12 digs

in a four-set victory against Missouri State. The 29 kills were the 17th highest single-match total in a four-set match in 2019.

2019 also marked the debut of **Fernando Morales** as head coach of the Purple Aces, initially on an interim basis, then full-time when he was signed to a multi-year contract on October 30. Morales led the Purple Aces to their first winning season since 2010 and their first MVC Tournament berth since 2008, where they exited in the first round after losing 3 contested sets to the eventual champions Illinois State. Had Feliciano been available for that match, who knows what might have happened? Almost a year to the day of signing with the Purple Aces, on October 2020, Morales was named the head coach of the Puerto Rico Women's Volleyball National Team. In his playing days, Morales lent his services as a setter to professional teams all over the world, including Russia, Greece, and Spain, and represented Puerto Rico at the 1987 Pan American Games in Rio de Janeiro and many other international tournaments as well. Morales is the son of two-time Olympian and Puerto Rican



Aces

MELANIE FELICIANO

Outstanding Matches

| Date | Kills | Digs | Httg % |
|----------|-------|------|--------|
| 9/13/19 | 29 | 16 | 0.424 |
| 9/14/19 | 27 | 9 | 0.371 |
| 9/14/19 | 36 | 20 | 0.253 |
| 9/27/19 | 22 | 14 | 0.191 |
| 9/28/19 | 24 | 9 | 0.389 |
| 9/30/19 | 20 | 9 | 0.153 |
| 10/4/19 | 21 | 11 | 0.214 |
| 11/4/19 | 20 | 11 | 0.259 |
| 11/15/19 | 22 | 12 | 0.455 |
| 11/16/19 | 21 | 21 | 0.129 |

456 **289** **0.224**
 Kills Digs Httg %

Aces

ALONDRA VÁZQUEZ

Outstanding Matches

| Date | Kills | Digs | Httg % |
|----------|-------|------|--------|
| 9/13/19 | 14 | 14 | 0.179 |
| 9/14/19 | 17 | 20 | 0.255 |
| 10/11/19 | 17 | 17 | 0.190 |
| 10/18/19 | 14 | 18 | 0.333 |
| 10/19/19 | 14 | 21 | 0.180 |
| 10/25/19 | 22 | 11 | 0.279 |
| 10/26/19 | 20 | 14 | 0.236 |
| 11/4/19 | 17 | 18 | 0.145 |
| 11/15/19 | 29 | 12 | 0.364 |
| 11/16/19 | 15 | 24 | 0.141 |

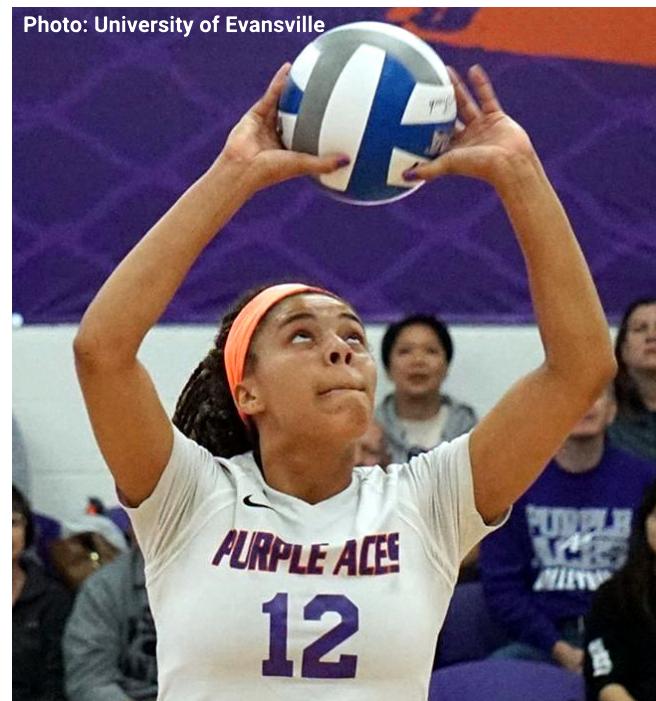
383 **407** **0.174**
 Kills Digs Httg %



The Top Ace In 2019, the Purple Aces were led by Fernando Morales, who guided them to their first winning season since 2010 and their first MVC Tournament berth since 2008. Morales has extensive international experience, having played professionally in several countries and represented Puerto Rico in many international tournaments. In October 2020, Morales was named the head coach of the Puerto Rico Women's National Team. (Photo: University of Evansville)

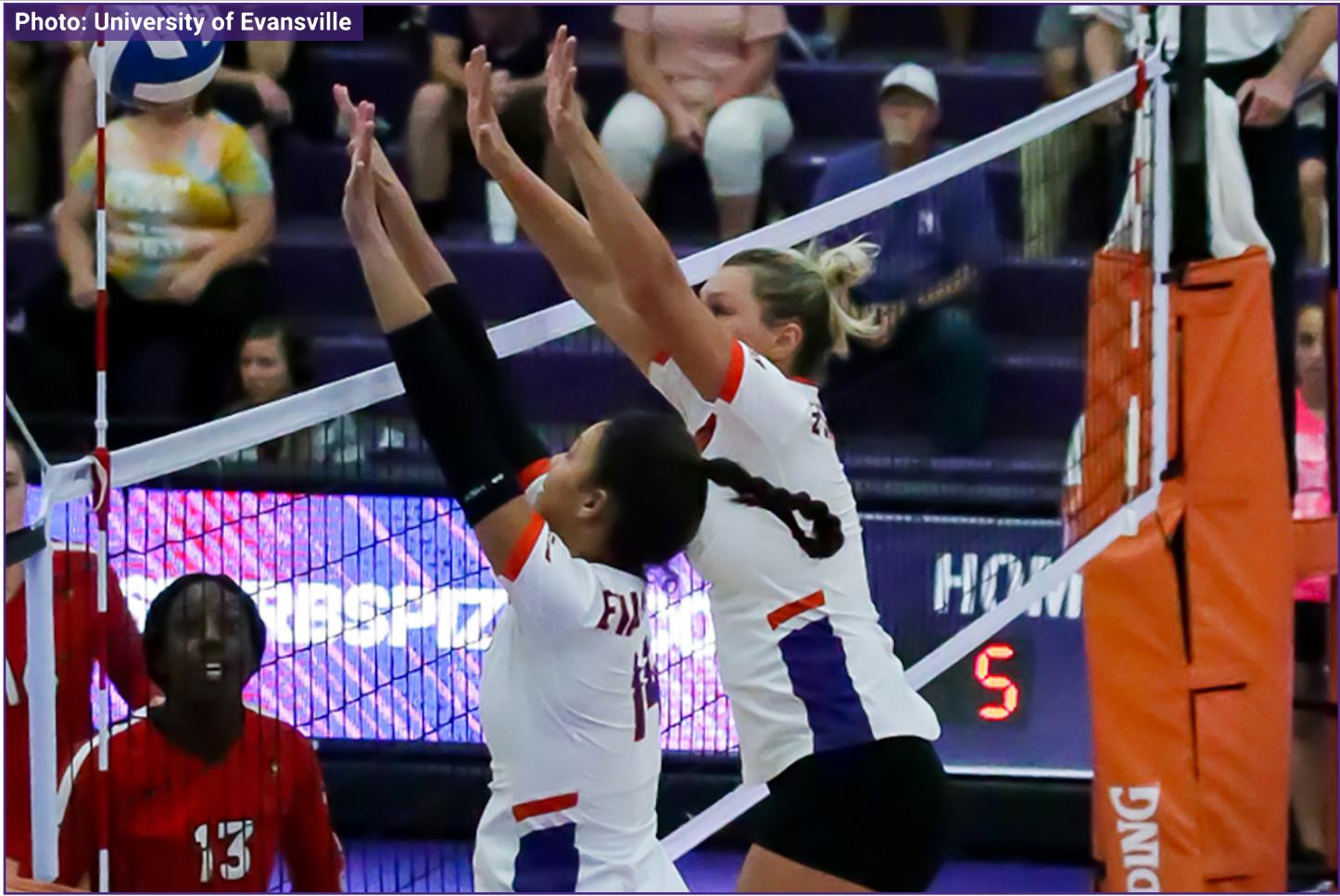
basketball legend Mario 'Quijote' Morales.

Together, a defense anchored by Brazilian senior Gabriela Macedo, who was fifth in the country in digs with 704, the soul-crushing blocks of freshman Hannah Watkins, the offensive capabilities of Tam, Feliciano and Vázquez, and the crafty service of **Laura Ruiz** (Cayey) made the Purple Aces one of the most entertaining teams to watch during the season. Although they will be losing Tam and Macedo to graduation, an exciting and more seasoned young core of players coming back, combined with the leadership of a senior setter in Allana McInnis (and up-and-coming setter **Cecilia Thon** (San Juan), who saw some playing time towards the end of the season) have Purple Aces fans looking forward to the near future. With the talent in hand, a trip to the NCAA Tournament may not be far in the offing.



Conducting the offense Throughout the season, Allana McInnis set up Feliciano and Vázquez for the vast majority of their kills, tallying up 1,227 assists in 2019.

Photo: University of Evansville



The power of a block Vázquez and freshman middle blocker Hannah Watkins attempt a block. Watkins, the bane of MVC attackers everywhere, provided a spark with her defense throughout the season, at times changing the momentum of a match. She totalled 104 blocks in 2019, one for every set she played in.



Photo: University of Evansville

Crafty service The artful service of Laura Ruiz (Cayey) was key in several of the Purple Aces matches.



Photo: University of Evansville

Up-and-coming setter Cecilia Thon (San Juan) saw some action at setter in the season's last 3 matches.