

Determined Member-Meneh thriving for MU volleyball

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Lektor Member-Meneh describes herself as hard-headed, or stubborn. But not most of the time.

When it comes to people telling her what she can or can't do, yes, she is. That was the case with volleyball.

Throughout her career she was told she wouldn't, and still won't, be able to succeed as a high-level volleyball player.

Nobody told Missouri's sophomore outside hitter that she wouldn't succeed in basketball, or track. Just volleyball, where 5-foot-8 outside hitters are a rarity.

So in that instance yes, she's as hard-headed as they come. It's a small part of why she pursued volleyball.

"They said I wouldn't do good at a high level. That right now I'm good because other people are undisciplined and when it comes down to it I shouldn't be playing volleyball," Member-Meneh said.

Instead of listening to what others have said, Member-Meneh is right where she needs to be.

She's a crucial member of a Missouri volleyball team that, despite featuring a host of newcomers, is 16-4 and 6-2 in the Southeastern Conference. She is second on the team in kills with 222 and of all players with more than 300 attempts, she has the highest kill percentage.

But where Missouri coach Wayne Kreklow has seen the most improvement in Member-Meneh is in her all-around game.

She has tallied 85 digs and 25 blocks on the season, which is more than her total last season, in five less sets.

But still her greatest asset is a byproduct of her height. Kylie Deberg, Missouri's leader in kills with 248, is 6-foot-4. She has eight inches on Member-Meneh, but with her jumping ability, the height differences don't really matter.

"It doesn't matter if you are 5-8, if you can play that high you can be a front row attacker and she is a testament to that," Kreklow said.

Most volleyball players hit the ball with power, but when Member-Meneh hits the ball there is a pop to it. One that nobody else on the floor has.

"Anytime anybody would watch her play that's what drove your eyes to her," Kreklow said. "That's what made her such a successful player in the club and high school level. It's her ability to elevate and hit with that kind of power."

For as long as she's known, she's always been one of the strongest hitters on the floor. But if you told her how impressive her kills are she will think you are overreacting.

"I don't look at my hit and go, 'Oh that's hard' and then look at Kylie's hit and think, 'Oh that's not hard.' To me, they look the same," she said. "I think people confuse how hard I hit with how high I jump maybe, so it may just look cooler."

Whether it looks cooler, or not, it works and has always worked. In high school Member-Meneh could jump higher than everybody so her kills would get blocked once a match, or once every two matches. She was named the 2016 Missouri High School Volleyball Coaches

Association Player of the Year in her senior year.

“It wasn’t until I got to college when I was dealing with people who were 6-5 on the regular. Six-foot-six on the regular, with big hands and large wingspans on the regular. Like, this was news to me,” Member-Meneh said. “I had to learn how to see the block and hit around it.”

Kreklow said her best asset on the floor is still her power, but he’s seen her become more disciplined in her hitting and pick her spots offensively.

“I don’t think she had been in a situation before when she needed skill. She could simply overpower people,” Kreklow said. “I think the huge improvement from a year ago is her embracing the notion that she can become a much better all-around player.”

Member-Meneh has had a mindset change since her freshman season.

In practice her mindset was to dominate every play.

“I would be like, ‘You are not stopping me. I’m going to kick the starting side’s behind every single time I step on the court,’” she said. “You will know my presence on the floor.”

Her freshman season had some bumps along the road. She had to fight for playing time on a loaded and experienced team, battled injuries, and a mid-season trip back to Nigeria. Despite it all she tallied 197 kills in 77 sets played, earning SEC All-Freshman team honors.

It was in that season when she realized that playing well in a game wasn’t good enough. With experienced outside hitters like Sydney Deeken and Melanie Crow in her spot, she had to do it every day.

“We had good girls on the team and they are older so you have to work even harder. It doesn’t matter if you are neck-and-neck with someone. If you are neck-and-neck with someone they are going to take the person who is older,” Member-Meneh said. “You have to show your presence and you have to be consistent too.”

But her mindset of kicking everybody’s butt in practice has changed this year. Now, her focus is on being the player her team needs every play.

She’s working on her passing, defense and her blocking technique.

“Last year I was put as a three-rotation hitter and no matter what somebody on the front line was going to kill so I just had to do my part whenever the ball came to me,” Member-Meneh said. “The situation is different now. You have to learn how to hit different shots. My mindset is now how can I get better so I can put my team in a better position? Last year, I don’t want to say it, but it was about me. This year it’s not about me. It’s about what do I need to do even if I’m having a bad game for my team to win?”

Kreklow's seen that change in Member-Meneh from last year.

"I think she is taking coaching a lot better than she did a year ago," Kreklow said. "Last year, like so many physically and talented players when they take the step to a next level it's often hard to get past the mindset that, 'I'm already really good what are you talking about?' This year she has grasped the notion that if she becomes a better passer, is a smarter attacker and improves her blocking technique that it will elevate her game to another level. I think she's become much more open and accepting of that."

But learning for Member-Meneh has never been a vocal thing. She learns from making mistakes.

In the summer, heading into this season, Member-Meneh learned a lot from putting herself into certain situations in the team's 6-on-6 scrimmages.

"If I messed up there were no coaches around to tell me, so I would learn this time she isn't about to block me or I'm going to do this differently," Member-Meneh said. "Doing that and repping that over and over again, that's when I got better."

During the season, 6-on-6 scrimmages aren't easy to come by. Instead, Kreklow uses some of his available time by watching film with the players to correct things.

"We spend a lot of time doing that," Kreklow said. "It's a tough call from the coaching standpoint because anytime we look at video with a player that counts as part of our practice time. You have to balance that. The need to watch video and see yourself do things as opposed to doing things on the court."

Regardless of its film learning, or doing it on the fly, Member-Meneh's instincts have taken over and it's proved to be a positive thing for Missouri.

"If I think I can't play," she said. "If I didn't create that instinct then I would be back where I started."

Member-Meneh's a much more mature person than she was as a freshman. She still wants to prove people wrong and show them that she can be a high-level Division I volleyball player, but she isn't worried about herself.

She's a top offensive option for Missouri, but she knows it doesn't matter how powerful she hits the ball if the team loses.

"It doesn't mean me getting 1,000 kills and not being disciplined on my block and us still losing. It doesn't mean me getting kills and I'm laying off blocker defense and we still lose," Member-Meneh said of her focus. "I don't need to be great in one area and not good in another area. I need to be good in all my areas so everyone else can be great."

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