

Seattle University

ScholarWorks @ SeattleU

---

The Spectator Online

Newspapers

---

10-12-2022

## 2022-10-12 Player Led and Coach Fed: The New Look of Redhawks Volleyball

Madden Armstrong  
*Seattle University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.seattleu.edu/spectator-online>

---

### Recommended Citation

Armstrong, Madden, "2022-10-12 Player Led and Coach Fed: The New Look of Redhawks Volleyball" (2022). *The Spectator Online*. 725.  
<https://scholarworks.seattleu.edu/spectator-online/725>

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Newspapers at ScholarWorks @ SeattleU. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Spectator Online by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ SeattleU.



# Player Led and Coach Fed: The New Look of Redhawks Volleyball

Madden Armstrong, Volunteer Reporter

The Seattle University Volleyball team has new coaches and players. Between two new assistant coaches and 13 new players—10 of whom are freshmen—Head Coach Michelle Cole is working with plenty of fresh ideas for the new season.

“Reflection is a big part of who we are, it’s part of this Jesuit education. Part of the Redhawk experience is that when you engage with something, you have to reflect about it,” Cole said. “I don’t know if I’ve ever been so collaborative with the team on how we wanted the year to go.”

Reflection on last year is complicated for the Redhawks. The 2021 volleyball season ended with a record of 4-21, placing Seattle U second from the bottom in the Western Athletic Conference (WAC), just ahead of Lamar University.

The team received a preseason ranking of thirteenth for the 2022 season from the WAC. However, the start of this fall is already shaping up to be better than the last, with the current Redhawks record at 4-8.

Cole, along with new assistant coaches Greg Shell and Mariko Downey, are taking several new approaches with the team this year. Before joining the Redhawks, Shell coached at Central Connecticut State for 18 years. Downey most recently coached for four years at the University of Washington. Their synergy as a coaching unit started from day one, according to Cole and Shell.

Shell’s work as assistant coach naturally fits into the particular focus of the team this year, passing and defense.

He works frequently with the Redhawks’ defensive specialists, one of whom is Sophomore Katlyn Sipes, a libero and psychology major.

Sipes was one of the only freshmen players on the volleyball team last year, and wants to change things up on the technical side and in regards to team cohesion. Working with Shell as one of the returning defensive specialists has given Sipes the space to trust her instincts and honed ability. She is dedicated to the art of the ‘scramble,’ a word that sums up the defensive strategy this year.

“The work that [Sipes] does, like some of the digs that she makes, some of the rallies that she keeps going, don’t show up on the stat sheet,” Cole said.



Jake Nelson

Freshman Merima Smajlovic lofts the ball over the net while playing Sam Houston State

In terms of team cohesion, quite a bit has changed in the past year in order to make the 13 new players feel welcome and bind the returning six even closer. 'The returners,' as the experienced players are known, have divided into leadership teams for the first time in order to make Redhawks Volleyball run more smoothly behind the scenes.

The volleyball players also show up for other student-athletes. The team has been spotted at other Seattle U games, managing to bring the whole roster to the sold-out Seattle U vs University of Washington men's soccer game, Sept. 20.

All of this plays into how the returners want to set a good example for their new teammates.

"Being a student-athlete is one of the hardest things to balance," Sipes said. "Being able to separate your hard days at school from coming to practice and being able to have a good practice, I think that's the most important thing for me."

Interviews with Cole, Shell, and Sipes were conducted ahead of a match versus Utah Valley University (UVU), Oct. 8. A tough 0-3 Sept. 24 match preceded it, which caused the team to rethink some strategy. Shell worked with the defensive specialists to keep the ball in play, along with the blockers to intercept strikes from UVU's offense. Prioritizing defensive strategy is one way the Seattle U team hopes to pick up a set against UVU in the future.

Even with the adjustments, an Oct. 8 meeting between Seattle U and UVU produced another difficult match, with a final score of 0-3.

Despite the unfortunate recent results, Cole is not rattled by tough matchups. She believes in building a solid foundation this year and igniting a spark that will fuel the team through this period of growth.

"We're building something new, and fresh, and different. It's not a rebuild, it's a build," Cole said.

Catch the Redhawks volleyball team at home versus Stephen F. Austin, Thursday, Oct. 13.