

Stacy Sykora's Long and Winding Road

"I'm not going to let two weeks define 34 years. I've had three two weeks. For me now, it's the journey and helping USA volleyball get better."

Stacy says this after our interview. With this final training block upon them, the Women's National Team is solidifying spots and the past few days, Stacy's name seems to have been called less and less in drills.

Just a little over a year ago, Stacy was fighting for her life in a well documented bus accident with her pro team in Brazil. Vision problems still linger, hampering her chances at a fourth Olympics. "I took a walk last night," she says, "to clear my head. I was walking around for a few hours." She says smiling.

She seems to have come to a place in her life where she will continue to fight for her profession but as she said, it's been a tremendous journey these last 34 years and nothing can, or will, take that away from her.



The first thing everyone wants to know if how you're feeling.

"Everyday is a challenge. Obviously I've never gone through this and a lot of people haven't either. Going from an accident to International volleyball, it isn't easy. It's a tough rough road but I'm trying to stay

positive. That's the main part; the biggest thing I'm doing that is helping me is staying positive."

Your vision was one of the things that has been affected by the accident. Can you tell us how you're doing in that area?

"There are still issues. It's called tracking. You are like this (holds two fingers next to each other and moves them in unison between us) while I'm like this (holds two fingers next to each other as before but one finger drags and trails the other finger significantly). My eyes aren't tracking at the same time so the ball will disappear. The doctor's say when my brain is healed and ready it will talk to my eyes and say I'm

healed, let's do it. That's what happens. When my brain is healed and ready it will talk to my eyes and my eyes and brain will work together. So I'm still healing obviously."

Is there a time frame for this?

"The doctors say the brain is a unique and incredible instrument and you never can predict, one day, two days, everyone is different and obviously every injury, every person is different. Every brain is different."

So you could wake up tomorrow and your vision could be back to normal?

"I wake up every morning thinking it. I think it's better and I come to the volleyball court and well...tomorrow."

There are 25 amazing athletes in this gym and more than half of them are going to get cut. For most of them, they've never been cut from a team ever! How do you prepare for that as an athlete?

"This is the thing, you aren't here for yourself. You have to be unselfish. You have to be here every day, 100%, no regrets, no excuses. That's my big thing I say all the time; no regrets, no excuses. Because you aren't here for yourself, you're here for USA, not only for the country but you're here for USA Volleyball. And if you can think that way everyday, you're having fun every single day and you love it every single day and then that becomes you being okay with it because you gave it all you can. It's not about you individually; it's about 12 girls that can play together as well.

It may not be the best 12 girls but it's the best 12 girls for the team. That's the biggest thing is you have to be unselfish and you have to think of the team and not think of yourself. And I'm learning that personally. It's difficult and it's tough but at the same time it's rewarding."

How many National Teams you've been a part of?

"This is the fourth: Mick Haley, Toshi (Yoshida), Jenny Lang Ping and now Hugh (McCutcheon)."

How has this coaching staff, this environment, this gym culture been different from the others, good or bad?

"It's different. I would never say better or worse because you can't really compare years because you have different teams, you have different players. And I'm older. There are so many different aspects you have to take into consideration. I personally think this staff; Hugh McCutcheon, Paula, Karch Kiraly? I mean come on...a gold medalist, thirty thousand times a gold medalist? I mean you have some of the best coaches and some of the best players who now coach so this staff for me is great and I

am older and I can be more relaxed, you can be your self more with this staff. You know, you hold yourself accountable and you're team is going to hold you accountable too but you can live. You can have a life. It's more tranquil, I guess, is the word."

Do being an experienced player in this program, you like this better?

"For me Toshi was amazing. He's one of the best coaches in the world, I honestly can say that. And I loved it when I was there, gosh it was the best style, it was great. Now with Hugh, and I'm older and I'm playing and he's the best coach, he's great. Like I said, every year changes because of the aspects that come with it, but I can say Hugh is a great coach and I like his style."

A little girl, growing up in Burlison, Texas and here you are, a three and maybe four time Olympian. What is it about you, what is it you heard or got from coaches that got you to this point?

"To be honest with you, and I don't know why, it's so weird but as a child I remember saying, "I'm going to the Olympics." I have papers, third grade papers, in my scrap book where I wrote down that I was going to the Olympics."

As a volleyball player?

"I didn't know. I played like a thousand sports but I have a painting I think I painted in Jr. High school with the Olympic rings and me looking up at it; the yellow Olympic ring like casting down on me. I told myself, I don't care what it takes; I wanted to go to the Olympics ever since I was a small child."

"FloJo? (Florence Griffith-Joyner) Remember FloJo? For me, I wanted to be like FloJo. It was crazy. Ever since I was little, I was like, "I'm going to the Olympics!" When I was in college, Laura Corbelli had won a silver medal and I remember touching her medal and I almost cried. It was the most amazing thing to me and listening to her stories. Then she told me one day, Stacey, they are looking at this new position called a libero. I was like I don't care what it's called, whatever it takes, I want to go and I want to try. From that point on..."

Was this coaching advice you had gotten or was it just in your head?

"It was just in my head when I was little. I remember the paper. Obviously since the accident I don't remember everything but I remember the paper and it wasn't the only paper I wrote, I wrote all the time about the Olympics, this is what I was going to do. I was a good athlete as a child, I was really good but I was from a small town, you know. Everyone was like, you're from a small town and you're amazing. So I was like, I'm amazing; I'm so amazing I'm going to the Olympics! And then it became this thing that I was going to do and I've never ever looked back. It's what I was going to do and now it feels comforting, like it's what I was supposed to do."

