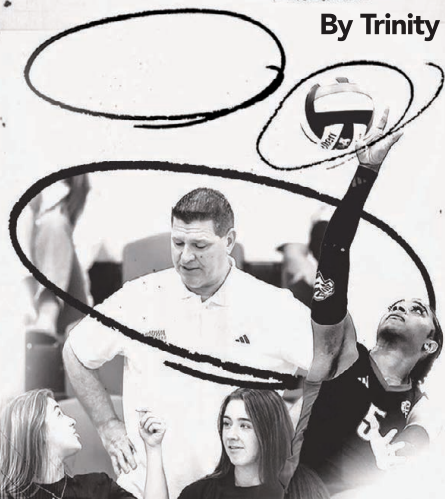


PHOTOS: JOE CHANCE

# FROM SCRATCH

By Trinity Cates



WEST ALABAMA

The University of West Alabama volleyball team enters this season with a new look and fresh mindset. Last year, the program welcomed coach John Schmidt. After initially focusing on adjusting to the existing team, Schmidt now builds a new team from scratch.

Players from the previous team have moved on to the next stage of life after college, leading to an influx of new players. Schmidt has always emphasized his belief in deep connections and authenticity in himself and his players. This shines through in his recruitment, as he now strives to select athletes with the qualities to build a solid foundation.

Schmidt works on constructing a sustainable foundation for long-term growth. "I recruited based on character and personality first, more than athleticism. We're talented athletically, but we are, you know, a little bit shorter in areas. So, we're trying to find a unique style of play with our talent," he said.

The players act and think quickly. Schmidt utilizes their individuality to create a style of play suited to them. "We're just taking it one day at a time," Schmidt said, "being more explosive and using their speed and quickness."

As one of the returning players, Jaida Alvin leads in this endeavor. "I try to be the best leader that I can," she said. "We're young, but we're fiery." Positive relations between players prove crucial in this process. "Our chemistry is great. We're all very close on and off the court," Alvin said. The team constantly works to improve themselves and their relationships with each other.

The freshmen, although new to college volleyball, have quickly adapted to the high level of competition and have brought fresh energy to the team.

The team also works through the challenges that come with having fewer senior members with experience. "We are still lacking in leadership, and we need that," said freshman setter Taylor Lamontagne. However, the lack of experience doesn't hold back the team. Their close bonding and hard work will surely bring them success. "We bond so well together," Lamontagne added. "We play together like a family."

## "We're young, but we're fiery."

In the long term, this team sets the bar for a new culture, focusing on growth and sisterhood over wins and losses. Regardless of the tribulations, they maintain a positive outlook. "Even if we have a bad practice, we always make sure just to move on and go to the next play," Alvin said. Their character, chemistry, and emerging leadership create the perfect combination for a bright future.

Under the guidance of Schmidt, Alvin's leadership, and the energy of the freshmen, UWA's volleyball program is poised to rise again, stronger and more cohesive than before. They're taking it one match at a time, growing together as a team, and preparing for what's next.