

Trio of transfers lead Norse volleyball invasion

PAUL OWEN
Sports Editor

For Bears volleyball setter Tore Hordvik, the hardest transition to Canada from his homeland has been the meals.

"[I miss] traditional Norwegian food—boiled potatoes and lamb," says the Bergen University transfer in his first-year of eligibility with the Golden Bears.

"And good bread," adds Eirik Thomassen, a left-side and libero also in his first year out of Bergen. "Europe has a lot better bread."

The pair have been friends and teammates throughout high school and university, making two previous trips to Edmonton in 2001 and 2003 as part of a touring volleyball team. So, it made sense for them to come to Alberta when looking for opportunities to travel abroad.

"Some of the guys on this [Bears] team, we played against five years ago, so it's good to have someone you know," Thomassen says.

Joining them on their most recent stay in Canada is Pandas volleyball setter Randi Bernsten, who got to know the guys when they were playing in Bergen. Having others from home around has eased the homesick feelings for all three players, and given them the ability to converse in their native tongue.

"I'm very glad that all three of us came together because it's a lot of new stuff and, in the beginning, to be able to go home and speak Norwegian [was very important]," Bernsten says.

"Even though we can speak English



MIKE OTTO

GREEN AND GOLD AND NORWEGIAN ALL OVER Thomassen (left), Bernsten (centre) and Hordvik love volleyball and Canada, but hate the food in HUB.

okay and understand people, it's not the same as speaking our own language," Thomassen adds.

The biggest athletic difference for all three has been the way their sports are now integrated into their schooling. In Norway, athletics are based on club sports and operate outside of school. That they're now playing for their academic institution eases the pressure placed on all three.

"It's much easier to combine sports and school," Bernsten says. "Back in

Bergen, I had the volleyball team and I had the school, and they were separate. If I had to travel with the team and missed something in school, it was my problem, but here, if I have to miss a class, they understand."

"All the guys are so excited about playing here. Back home, there are [35-year-old] guys who're like, 'Oh, I've played volleyball for 20 years, I'm just here because I have to be here,'" adds Hordvik of his club teams, which were comprised of former pros and

other players of all ages, instead of only university students like the teams in Canada.

Unlike many students going to school in foreign countries, the three Norwegians are all planning on earning full degrees from the U of A—Hordvik and Bernsten in Physical Education, and Thomassen in Arts or Business. Their long-term plans bode well for both teams.

None of the players have earned significant playing time yet, but their

off-court contributions have been noticeable according to both Pandas head coach Eisler and Bears bench boss Terry Danyluk. Both coaches point out that all three are very kind people who fit in with their teams right away.

Getting used to their new teammates hasn't been a problem, but there's still the matter of Hordvik's disappointment in the local fare.

"[Canadians] eat much more fast food," he says. "When you go through HUB, the smell is so bad."

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