

## Kmiecik, Mudhens, Eagle Women Rebuild, Reload

Written by Alex Goff

Tuesday, 09 October 2012 23:04

---

USA fullback Ashley Kmiecik might be looking ahead to the USA Women's National Team tour of Europe in November, but right now she's in the middle of a club season, trying to get the Emerald City Mudhens back in contention.



The Mudhens can certainly score points, but have been undone by their defense, sitting at 2-3 so far this season despite averaging over 30 points a game. On the weekend of September 29-30, the Mudhens scored 83 points, and went 1-1 (!), losing 42-43 to the NorCal Triple Threat.

“We need to launch together on defense,” said Kmiecik. “We are a team of hard hitters, but when we don’t come up as a shield of defense it allows the other team to hit the gaps. We also need to break the pattern of being a second-half team. Many of the Mudhens play 7s, so speed and fitness aren't a problem, but it's just the mental switch that needs to happen the first minute of the game instead of second half when we're down by 20 points.”

The Midhens are a young team, with a lot of players just recently out of the University of Washington and Western Washington University. And with a new coach as well, the squad needs some time to really come together. Their recent 2-1 indicates that might be happening.

Coach Phil Killham has “laid some really great groundwork for us, and the faster style of rugby works for us,” said Kmiecik. “We're continuing to build on that and next fall will be a different story for the ‘Hens. We won't have to start from scratch because we have a solid foundation.”

For the USA team, Kmiecik is dealing with change, as well.

“This is going to be my first USA tour since the World Cup and the dynamic is very different.” she said. “I think Pete and the rest of the coaching staff have built a program based on our strengths. Some players have been asked to play different positions because it works better for

## Kmiecik, Mudhens, Eagle Women Rebuild, Reload

Written by Alex Goff

Tuesday, 09 October 2012 23:04

---

the team. Pete wants to make sure the best players are out there, so he finds a place for us ... even if it's not what we're used to playing.”

This has manifested itself into former flanker Sam Pankey playing center or fullback, and center or flyhalf Rebecca Brafman playing prop. Kmiecik, who has almost always been a wing or fullback, is now a scrumhalf.

“Our team is quick, physical and relentless at the point of contact,” she enthuses, now that she’s right at the base of the ruck. “It’s been a while since there’s been an international tour, so we’re champing at the bit! I think the European countries should be ready to encounter a very physical style of American rugby. We’re ready to compete.”

Physicality will be a hallmark of the USA team going forward, said Kmiecik, and other observers agree that it has to be – England especially, but also France, Canada, and New Zealand are all big and physical.

“The team came very close to beating England at Nations Cup and it’s because we challenged them at the point of contact and played to our strengths,” Kmiecik explained. “I wouldn’t say we need to be mean or ornery, but aren’t going to be pushed around. We’ll do what it takes to make it to the final in 2014.”

Getting injured in the first game of the 2010 World Cup and not being able to play any further part in the event sticks with the Mudhen star, and she wants to get back to the World Cup, just to compete.

“Going from being a competitive, international athlete to an injured player in the stands was one of the hardest transitions I’ve ever had to go through,” she said. “I know what it’s like to be there and not be able to compete, so I’m ready to try again and feel stronger both mentally and physically.”

She will have plenty of competition for places on the team. Kmiecik said she’s very impressed with the work of flyhalves Hannah Stolba and Sadie Anderson, especially their field vision and kicking game.

“Sarah Chabot and Shaina Turley will hit anything that comes in their way and their tenacity is contagious on the field,” she added. “Carrie White has one of the best technical scrumhalf passes and is a threat at the breakdown. Then there’s Jamie Burke - 14 tours and she’s still arguably the one of the best props in the world.”

And one more.

“Although he’s not a player, I’m most impressed with how much energy Pete Steinberg puts into this program and works relentlessly to get us the same treatment as any other professional rugby player.”

## **Kmiecik, Mudhens, Eagle Women Rebuild, Reload**

Written by Alex Goff

Tuesday, 09 October 2012 23:04

---