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Fifth time could be the charm

Zoie Clift December 20, 2011

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Four-time Olympian Danielle Scott-Arruda took off the entire 2010 season to give birth to her first child, Julianne.

Last month, the 39-year-old confirmed she was back. Scott-Arruda returned to action at the FIVB World Cup in Tokyo, where she helped Team USA finish as silver medalists behind champion Italy. In the process, the United States also earned a berth into the London 2012 Olympic Games.

Once again, Scott-Arruda hopes to be there.

And should she made the U.S. squad, Scott-Arruda would become the first U.S. volleyball player to play in five consecutive Games and would tie a world all-time record set by Brazilian player Helia Rogerio de Souza and Russia's Yevgeniya Artamonova-Estes.

"Making the fifth Olympics would be amazing, but my focus is to be a part of this team and help anyway I can," said Scott-Arruda, who has been a familiar face on the U.S. national team since 1994. "Making a fifth Olympics is kind of just a result of my efforts to make USA as good as it can be."

After the World Cup, during which Team USA beat Brazil, the Americans are looking good. The squad is ranked No. 1 in the world and likely will enter the 2012 Games as one of the top contenders for the gold medal. Brazil, Cuba, Russia and China are also expected to be in the medal mix.

"This team is good," U.S. coach Hugh McCutcheon said. "And there are a lot of players that contribute to that. Danielle is certainly one ... she is a wonderful volleyball player. But her story is even more remarkable because of her drive and commitment to getting back."

Regarded as one of the best middle blockers in the world, Scott-Arruda never had any doubt that she would come back after Julianne was born. She started training again as soon as her doctor released her to do so—around four weeks after delivery.

"I think having her (Julianne) and wanting her to know that I was able to come back to volleyball and play at a high level has been a motivation for me," she said.

The Louisiana native, who was listed by *Volleyball Magazine* as one of the Top 35 U.S. Players of All Time, credits her strong support system with helping her come back. Her



Photo: Steve Dykes/Getty Images

Danielle Scott-Arruda #2 of the USA knocks the ball over the net during the volleyball match between the USA Women's National Volleyball team and Brazil on June 14, 2008 at Clune Arena at the US Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

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mom is retired and can help take care of Julianne.

"I have that in my family, friends, and fans," she said. "And I'm so grateful my mom can travel with me and my daughter."

The most difficult aspect of the process was the tight timeframe needed to get back on the squad. "It's a very talented team," she said. "We have a lot of depth. Which adds to making things difficult for the coach, but it makes our team that much stronger."

According to McCutcheon, who coached the U.S. men's team to gold at the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games, it's not just her longevity in the sport that stands out, but that "she's maintained such a high level for such a long time."

Key to this has been lack of injuries.

Besides suffering a broken left ring finger before the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, she's played out her career without any major athletic setbacks. Staying active year round, recovery massages, and listening to her body is necessary.

"The moment I notice something isn't feeling right I take care of it right away," she said.

Scott-Arruda has been playing sports for most of her life, saying, "I loved playing sports growing up, it didn't matter what it was in P.E. except for golf." But eventually she got hooked on volleyball.

"I played basketball, softball, and track and field, but volleyball was the one I didn't feel like all eyes were on me," she said. "I was really shy. So I think that's one of the reasons I was able to excel."

She grew up watching the Olympic Games but at the time she didn't realize it could potentially be her out there one day.

It wasn't until she started playing club volleyball in high school that this thought process shifted. Among her club instructors were legendary coach Ruth Nelson and Olympian Rose Magers-Powell, who was part of the U.S. team that earned the silver medal at the Los Angeles 1984 Games.

After the experience she made a list of where she wanted to be in five years. Number 1 was to play in the Olympic Games; No. 2 was to play pro volleyball.

She went on to become an NCAA champion at Long Beach State and after college, she joined the U.S. national team. She then knocked both numbers off her list.

Over the years her pro career has taken her around the world, playing for club teams in Italy and Japan and for the past seven seasons in Brazil, where she currently plays for Sao Bernardo. Her husband, Eduardo Arruda, is a former Brazilian player.

As experienced as she is, she still has the giddiness of a novice. When she received her team jerseys for the World Cup, she was excitedly taking pictures.

"I still have that spirit and passion of a rookie, but I've gained a lot of experience along the way, which I think just adds to my game," Scott-Arruda said.

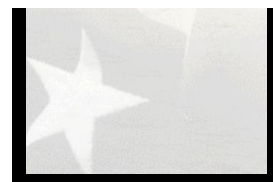
Though the London squad hasn't been named yet — USA Volleyball expects to name the roster in June — the Americans know they will have to be at the top of their games if they want to live up to their No. 1 ranking.

The U.S. women's indoor teams have two Olympic silver medals and one bronze, but they have yet to land a gold medal, which is another goal at the top of Scott-Arruda's list.

"Playing for the USA and having the red, white and blue on my back is what drives me," she said. "And the strive of an Olympian to try and win a gold medal...I think we have a good opportunity to do that with this team. I'm honored and fired up to see what we can do in London."

Story courtesy Red Line Editorial, Inc. Zoie Clift is a freelance contributor for teamusa.org. This story was not subject to the approval of any National Governing Bodies

Tags: Danielle Scott-Arruda, Hugh McCutcheon, London 2012 Olympic Games, Volleyball, Zoie Clift



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