

# Atlanta Vibe Volleyball Team Preps for Gwinnett Debut

By Jack Batten | Jan 4, 2024

Link: [https://www.gwinnettdaily.com/sports/atlanta-vibe-volleyball-team-preps-for-gwinnett-debut/article\\_736f4b02-ab6b-11ee-94b2-7b579ddb917e.html](https://www.gwinnettdaily.com/sports/atlanta-vibe-volleyball-team-preps-for-gwinnett-debut/article_736f4b02-ab6b-11ee-94b2-7b579ddb917e.html)

Gas South Arena has added another professional sports tenant — but unlike the others, the newest one is homegrown.

Joining the Atlanta Gladiators (formerly the Mobile Mysticks), the Georgia Swarm (Minnesota Swarm) and the Gwinnett Stripers (Richmond Braves) is the Atlanta Vibe, an inaugural member of the brand new Pro Volleyball Federation (PVF).

As excitement builds for the Jan. 24 season opener against the Omaha Supernovas, Vibe head coach Todd Dagenais looked on during Wednesday's first team practice, preparing for a new chapter of his coaching career.

Dagenais, 53, joined the Vibe in May of 2023, after 15 seasons as the head coach for Central Florida — leaving the Knights as the winningest coach in program history. Additionally, Dagenais served as a head coach of the Collegiate National Team, as well as an assistant on the U.S. Women's National squad.

Searching for a new opportunity with different challenges, Dagenais moved 450 miles north to Atlanta, where he was named the first head coach of the franchise. One of the tasks Dagenais will face as a professional coach is cutting players after training camp ends on Jan. 22.

Of the 20 players that are currently vying for a spot on the team, just 14 will make the final roster, in addition to a pair of practice players.

For Dagenais, constructing a roster in the college ranks was much less cut-throat, but the “management” of a pro roster is part of what lured him to Gwinnett County.

“Ever since I got a taste of working with professionals at the national team level, my mind was always there,” Dagenais said of his transition to the PVF. “I have always prided my career on being a skill technician, but now I have a chance to do what I really love, which is manage and create a team of women who are going to play for something important. To be able to do that was enough to move me out of the college game, and at the end of my career, down the road, I can look back and think that this is what I was meant to do.”

Four of the 20 members of the training camp roster were selections in the inaugural PVF Draft, held on Dec. 12. Most notable is Atlanta’s first-round pick of Chiamaka Nwokolo, a 2023 All-ACC second team performer at Pittsburgh.

The Vibe’s following draft picks were Whitney Bower (BYU), Kamaile Hiapo (BYU) and Kara McGhee (Baylor).

A majority of the remaining players added from free agency are former NCAA stars who have been playing overseas due to the worldwide popularity of the sport.

Tori Dilfer-Stringer, a setter for the Vibe, fit this description to a tee. Previously an All-American at Louisville, Dilfer-Stringer played the last two years in Puerto Rico, most recently for Pinkin de Corozal.

The opportunity to play professionally in her home country was one she wasn’t going to pass up — especially for a team that she believes is going to contend in its debut season.

“We know that in order to build team chemistry fast, open communication is needed,” said Dilfer-Stringer, whose father is longtime NFL quarterback Trent Dilfer, now head football coach at Alabama-Birmingham. “Nobody’s afraid to give or receive feedback, because we’re doing it in a positive way. I think that goes with the maturity of being professionals. We know how to handle ourselves and we understand that we have a short time to prepare for our first match. ... I think we stack up well. On paper, we look really good, but we all know that games aren’t won on paper. I foresee great things, though. We’re all really excited for January 24th.”

A week after their season debut in Omaha, the Vibe will play in Gas South Arena for the first time on Feb. 1, when they host the San Diego Mojo.

Seven teams will compete in the 2024 PVF season, (Atlanta, Omaha, San Diego, Columbus, Grand Rapids, Orlando and Las Vegas) before it expands to 10 teams in 2025 with the addition of franchises in Dallas, Indianapolis and Kansas City.