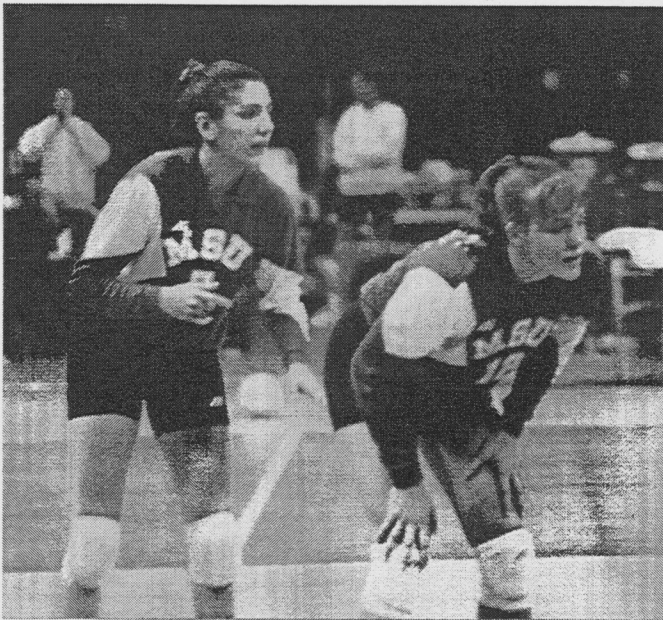

THE SERVICE LINE

Volleyball News from the MSU SideOut Club
Vol. II No. 3
November 1996

Spartans Back on Top of Big Ten

After a shaky start, the MSU women's volleyball team has recovered their winning form of last year. The Big Ten race is almost a carbon copy of 1995, with Michigan State undefeated in first place at the halfway point, and Penn State two games behind at 8-2. Even the polls look like last year, ranking the Spartans in the sixth spot nationally.



Veronica Morales and Val Sterk (photo: Andy Kurtz)

Val Sterk is once again among the nation's leaders in hitting percentage, and Veronica Morales is still on track to become MSU's all-time leader in kills, and possibly digs, by the time she finishes her career. (Team statistics are shown at the top of page two.) Some highlights in the team's turnaround include:

■ Jenna Wrobel's hitting. During October, Jenna was named Big Ten Player of the Week twice, as well as earning an NCAA Player of the Week award. This was quite a contrast to the opening of the season, when Jenna wasn't performing up to her standards of last year, being dug too easily by the opponents and with too many hitting errors.

Hampered by a sore shoulder, as well as 1995's ankle injury, she said at that time, "I'm still about four inches short in my vertical jump, but I'm working on getting it back." The improvement is now visible on the court, where she is once again putting the ball down at radical angles. She has returned to being the team's most frequent kill leader, and has had many matches hitting over .300.

■ Jenny Whitehead's blocking. The freshman is now second on the team in blocks per game, and has been the team leader in this category in more than one match. Jenny is not being used very much in the offense yet, getting only one or two sets in most games, but the recent match against Illinois was her best hitting performance to date, with a percentage of .600 on ten attacks.

■ Team serving. In September, fans were groaning at the Spartans' poor serving, but since the Big Ten season started, things have improved. What's the difference? Three of the players—Val Sterk, Veronica Morales, and Julie Pavlus—have stopped jump serving and gone back to well-placed floaters. Their aces-to-errors ratios have improved considerably as a result.

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Player	OFFICIAL STATS through 10/28													-----PER GAME AVERAGE-----						
	GP	K	E	TA	PCT	A	SA	SE	RE	DG	BS	BA	TB	BE	K	TA	SA	DG	TB	A
Sterk, V	72	312	59	563	.449	15	22	40	12	147	21	70	91	13	4.33	7.82	0.31	2.04	1.26	0.21
Cooke, D	72	194	66	504	.254	43	43	62	16	217	13	67	80	10	2.69	7.00	0.60	3.01	1.11	0.60
Morales, V	67	236	80	625	.250	8	6	21	3	165	5	20	25	5	3.52	9.33	0.09	2.46	0.37	0.12
Whitehead, J	62	63	28	143	.245	12	7	20	5	37	9	65	74	17	1.02	2.31	0.11	0.60	1.19	0.19
Pavlus, J	72	23	9	58	.241	944	13	18	0	170	2	24	26	8	0.32	0.81	0.18	2.36	0.36	13.11
Wrobel, J	72	323	149	795	.219	8	19	58	30	184	3	38	41	4	4.49	11.04	0.26	2.56	0.57	0.11
Vonderheide, T	61	11	6	39	.128	3	19	48	19	112	0	1	1	0	0.18	0.64	0.31	1.84	0.02	0.05
Richard, C	57	14	7	56	.125	7	3	2	2	19	0	10	10	3	0.25	0.98	0.05	0.33	0.18	0.12
Clayton, L	21	6	4	18	.111	4	1	5	5	17	3	13	16	3	0.29	0.86	0.05	0.81	0.76	0.19
MICHIGAN STATE	72	1182	408	2801	.276	1044	133	274	92	1068	56	308	210	63	16.42	38.90	1.85	14.83	2.92	14.50
Opponents	72	927	517	2770	.148	828	92	196	133	1035	34	203	136	49	12.88	38.47	1.28	14.38	1.88	11.50

Legend: GP-games played, K-kills, E-errors, TA-total attacks, PCT-hitting percent, A-assists, SA-service aces, SE-service errors, RE-reception errors, DG-digs, BS-solo blocks, BA-block assists, TB-total blocks, BE-block errors

Meanwhile, Dana Cooke, Tammy Vonderheide, and Jenna Wrobel have stuck with the jump serve. Dana now leads the Big Ten in aces, with an average of .60 per game, and is making only 1.44 errors per ace.

The benefits of tough serving are not fully evident in statistics, because they don't show the number of bad passes and overpasses that result. Stats also don't show the psychological effect on the opposing teams when difficult serves force them to make desperation moves to keep the ball in play.

■ The return of the quick offense and team coordination. Julie Pavlus is now fully showing her setting skills, and our hitters are responding with

better performances. In games where MSU is dominant, you can see the failure of the opponent's blockers to follow the play and get into position. Our own hitters are also more attuned to the sets, so they are approaching better and thus attacking better. Overall the team now looks more like a team than they did in the early going.

Coach's Luncheon at Trippers

The SideOut Club is pleased to present what we hope will become a regular event—a pre-match luncheon featuring Coach Erbe and other special guests. The first one will be held at 12:00 noon Saturday, November 16 at Trippers in Frandor, prior to the Iowa match. The cost is \$7.50 for SideOut Club members and \$10 for non-members.

Visit the SideOut Club Home Page on the World-Wide Web

The MSU SideOut Club now has a home page on the World-Wide Web, at the address: <http://kurtz.tcimet.net/sideout/>

The new page will provide Club members with information about the team and Club activities, and it will publicize MSU volleyball to others around the country and the world. It is known to several of the major search engines on the Web, and will soon be registered with others, so that anyone who tries to search for Michigan State volleyball (or even just

The Service Line

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volleyball) should be able to find our page.

The site was developed by Andy Kurtz, who works at MSU as a multimedia programmer. He started it on his own a couple of years ago, while he was a master's student in computer science. He is now operating it on a volunteer basis for the SideOut Club. Andy has been a volleyball fan all his life, and has been following Division I action for over ten years. If you look in the *Photo Gallery* section of the web page, you'll see some of Andy's photographic work, an example of which is used on this issue's front cover.

Two of the more interesting sections are *In the News* and *Schedule*. *In the News* has links to other sites that have articles on the Web about MSU volleyball. Many articles are from the MSU State News, which is a convenience for those who don't have access to the campus paper. These links also include the volleyball press releases issued each week by MSU Sports Information, which were not generally available to the public prior to the World-Wide Web. Unfortunately, the Lansing State Journal is not yet available on the Web, so even though they often have articles about the team, their volleyball stories cannot be read electronically.

The *Schedule*, as you might guess, shows this season's schedule, but also includes results of all matches, posted the same night or the following morning. For home matches, Andy also posts the official statistics, usually on Saturday night or Sunday morning.

Another section of note is the newsletter page. Here, the contents of *The Service Line* is published electronically about a week after it is sent to members. We had some misgivings about making a member benefit available to the general public, but after careful consideration decided that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages.

First, we hope that allowing non-members a look at the electronic newsletter might actually encourage new memberships. Second, we'd like volleyball fans from elsewhere in the country to see the fruits of our labor, and perhaps be impressed with what an active, high-quality program we have at MSU.

Members still get the convenience of newsletter delivery to their homes, and the better appearance of a paper copy. They also now have access to back issues they might not have kept.

Andy reports that over 300 different people from at least five countries have accessed the site already, viewing over 10,000 items of information. The SideOut Club web site has more sections in addition to those described above, so check it out soon and explore them for yourself.

Team Notes

■ MSU has an unusual streak on the line as they prepare to visit Ohio State and Penn State on November 8 and 9. These teams have been paired in the Big Ten schedule for the last five years, so that the two play at MSU on the same weekend, and the Spartans travel to their campuses on one road trip. You may remember that MSU has beaten both of these opponents the last three times they have met. More surprising than this, however, is that each of these past three weekend matchups has earned an NCAA Player of the Week honor for an MSU player!

Dana Cooke was the first honoree, for the October 20-21, 1995 trip, when MSU became the first team ever to win back-to-back victories over the two teams on their home courts. Val Sterk won her own award at home on November 17-18, 1995, when Michigan State clinched the Big Ten title with two more victories. Most recently, Jenna Wrobel was named Player of the Week for her performance on the October 11-12 weekend this year against OSU and PSU.

■ According to the Lisle, Illinois *Daily Herald*, Christie Landry of Wheaton St. Francis High School has verbally committed to play volleyball at MSU. (NCAA rules prohibit schools from commenting on commitments prior to February signings, so no information was available from the MSU coach or Athletic Department.)

According to an October 4 article in the *Chicago Tribune*, Landry came back from knee-ligament surgery after her freshman year to become the "go-

to" player on her team. Her high-school coach calls her "the best all-around player I've coached." Landry herself says, "Actually, I like digging a lot better than hitting. It's kind of easy for someone 6-1 to get a kill. But to make a great dig, that's cool. Players as tall as I am are supposed to be slow."

She also plays for a Sports Performance club team, where she was named a second-team Junior Olympic All-American.

Follow the Team on the Road—Penn State and U-M

If you haven't signed up for the SideOut Club bus trip to Penn State for the November 9 match, there may still be time. The cost of the bus trip is \$69 for members, and lodging will add approximately \$80 per room. For more information call Dean McCracken at 694-6979 or Dave Pike at 626-9914 as soon as possible.

It would also be great to have a big MSU presence in Ann Arbor for the November 2 match against the Wolverines. It's just a short drive, yet there aren't many Spartan volleyball fans that make the trip.

The U-M match is at 7:00 pm at Cliff Keen arena, which is at the corner of Hoover and State Streets. Parking (behind the arena, off State Street) will be tough early in the day, since the MSU/U-M football game will be played a few blocks away starting at 12:00, but it shouldn't be much of a problem by 7:00.

U-M volleyball is attracting much smaller crowds than MSU is this year; if we try hard enough, we could probably outnumber their fans!

The Referee's Stand

Continuing last issue's theme of where players may play on the court, this column will focus on attacking and blocking by back-row players.

One of the unique features of volleyball is that although players rotate around the court to play all positions, players who are in the back row are temporarily restricted as to the role they can play in

attacking and blocking. On one play you may see Val Sterk kill a slide behind the setter for a side out, but as soon as she rotates into the back row she is no longer allowed to make that same play.

The court that each team plays on is divided into a front court and a back court by the *attack line*, which runs across the court three meters from the net. Since the full area is nine meters square, the front court makes up one third of the court. The attack line is considered part of the front court.

The attack line is ignored for most play during a game. Players who are in the back row are free to move up in front of the attack line whenever they want, and front row players may go behind it.

The attack line comes into play when a back-row player hits the ball over the net to the other team's court. In order for this play to be legal, one of two conditions must be met: either 1) some portion of the ball must be below the level of the top of the net, or 2) the back-row player must have last made contact with the floor behind the attack line. The intent is that each team be restricted to only three spikers at the net.

The referee's signal for an illegal back-row attack is to swing the forearm downward in a motion similar to a spike.



Two aspects of this rule are often misunderstood. First, it makes no difference whether a player jumps or not; what is important is the position of the ball relative to the height of the net. A very tall player, who can reach a ball above the net, could make an illegal back-row attack while standing on the floor, while a very short player might be able to make a legal attack while jumping, because the ball could be below the top of the net. In other words, the ref simply ignores whether the player is jumping or not.

Second, the way the player hits the ball does not matter. Any ball that is sent towards the opponent's court is an attack hit, whether it was spiked, dinked, set with two hands, popped off a fist, etc. If such a hit is made from entirely above the net by a back-row player on or in front of the attack line, it is an illegal attack.

There is also a rule prohibiting back-row players from blocking. The intent of the rule is similar to that for attackers—to restrict each team to three blockers. Another column will explain exactly what constitutes a block; for now all you need to know is that back-row players may not do it. The referee's signal for an illegal back-row blocker is to raise the hands as if blocking.



You will typically see violations of these rules in three situations.

■ Many teams, including MSU, now use their back-row players as attackers. If the ball is set too far forward in the court, or the hitter misjudges her approach, she may step on or over the attack line while jumping to hit the ball. If she also hits the ball while it is entirely above the net, the attack is illegal.

■ During rotations where the setter is in the back row, she may violate the back-row rules while trying to set bad passes. For example, if the pass crosses the net while the setter is trying to reach it, the opposing hitter may spike the ball back into the setter's hands above the net. This is considered an illegal back-row block by the setter.

■ Another outcome of a pass too close to the top of the net may be that the back-row setter jumps and reaches the ball above the net to set it, but cannot control it well enough and accidentally sets it over the net. This is an illegal back-row attack.

To really complete this topic, you need to know one more fine point. If a back-row setter sets the first or second hit from above the net and sends it towards the net where an opponent blocks it, the setter's hit may or may not constitute an illegal attack. If the referee believes that one of the setter's teammates would have been able to make a play on the ball if it had not been blocked, then there is no violation by the setter. If no teammate had a chance of playing the ball, the setter's play is deemed an illegal attack. The idea is that a blocker legally interceding into what would have been a legal offensive play should not convert that play into an illegal one. (However, this situation comes up so infrequently that you can probably ignore it.)

SideOut Club Report

Make Your Plans for the Final Four

The SideOut Club is negotiating for deeply discounted room rates and for prime seating not available to the general public at the 1996 Final Four in Cleveland, OH.

The semifinals will be played on Thursday, December 19, and the championship match will be held on Saturday, December 21.

The Club will not be arranging transportation as we did last year, but encourage members to sign up at the merchandise table if they are considering attending this event and think they might want to take advantage of the hotel and ticket deals.

NCAA Volleyball News at Matches

The newest addition to the SideOut Club merchandise area is a poster reporting the latest match results from the Big Ten and for the top-ranked teams from around the country. It also includes the Big Ten standings and most recent Player of the Week awards. Look for it especially on Saturdays when it will always have the news of what happened the previous night.

Personalized Chairs for the Players

Your Club's latest contribution has paid for painting players' names on the chairs that they use in the locker room. Each player will be given her chair to take with her as a memento when she graduates.

Media Guides Available for Members

If you have not picked up your free 1996 MSU Volleyball media guide, plan to do so soon. Come to the Club merchandise table at any of the four remaining home matches to get your copy.

Don't Forget "Battle for Boosters"!

Help the SideOut Club prove the importance of volleyball at MSU, and win \$5,000 for the program. If you have friends with an interest in volleyball, encourage them to join the Club this fall.

1996 Schedule and Results

(All home matches are played in Jenison Field House)

8/30	L	TEXAS	15-10, 14-16, 8-15, 15-10, 15-17
8/31	W	HOUSTON	10-15, 15-8, 15-13, 15-4
9/1	L	STANFORD	14-16, 8-15, 4-15
9/6	L	Nebraska	7-15, 11-15, 15-13, 15-11, 13-15
9/7	L	Nebraska	11-15, 8-15, 7-15
9/13	W	Niagara	15-2, 15-1, 15-6
9/13	W	West Virginia	15-0, 15-10, 15-8
9/14	W	Loyola	15-13, 15-8, 16-14
9/14	W	Cleveland State	15-1, 15-3, 15-4
9/20	W	KENTUCKY	15-2, 15-7, 15-8
9/27	W	Indiana	13-15, 15-7, 15-1, 15-8
9/28	W	Purdue	15-6, 15-2, 14-16, 15-6
10/2	W	Northwestern	19-4, 18-13, 10-8
10/4	W	MICHIGAN	10-15, 15-3, 15-6, 15-11
10/11	W	PENN STATE	9-15, 15-7, 15-7, 9-15, 15-12
10/12	W	OHIO STATE	15-9, 17-15, 12-15, 15-6
10/18	W	Iowa	15-5, 15-11, 15-4
10/19	W	Illinois	15-4, 13-15, 15-3, 15-10

10/25	W	MINNESOTA	15-9, 15-13, 15-7
10/26	W	WISCONSIN	15-5, 15-11, 15-11
10/30		NORTHWESTERN	7:00 pm
11/2		@Michigan	7:00 pm
11/8		@Ohio State	
11/9		@Penn State	5:00 pm (ESPN2)
11/15		ILLINOIS	7:00 pm
11/16		IOWA	7:00 pm
11/22		@Wisconsin	
11/23		@Minnesota	
11/29		PURDUE	7:00 pm
11/30		INDIANA	7:00 pm
12/4		NCAA 1st round	
12/7		NCAA 2nd round	
12/13-14		NCAA Regionals	
12/19		NCAA Semifinals	
		Cleveland State University	
12/21		NCAA Championship	
		Cleveland State University	



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