
The SERVICE LINE

Volleyball News from the MSU SideOut Club

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The Best MSU Recruiting Class Ever?

Membership Meeting March 18; No Mail-In Voting

As previously announced, the SideOut Club annual membership meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, March 18. However, **the meeting time has been changed to 6:00 pm.** The meeting will be held in room 225 of Jenison Field House (enter through the main front doors as if to go to the ticket office and then bear left down the hall). We hope to have a very good turnout, because we want to hear feedback from members about the activities you would like us to undertake next year, or anything else that's on your mind.

One order of business at the meeting will be the election of Board members. The mail-in voting that had been planned will not be offered, due to an insufficient number of candidates for the seats available.

As of this writing, we have only two candidates for five seats, so we are still looking for members who would be interested in serving on the Board. Nominations will be allowed at the meeting. If you would like to get more involved in Spartan volleyball, contact Dean McCracken at 694-6669.

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Michigan State University has announced the signing of four volleyball players—Sarah Gustin, Christie Landry, Jessica Sanborn and Maren Witzel—to attend MSU next year and play for the defending Big Ten champion Spartans.

The four players comprise one of the most important recruiting classes in coach Chuck Erbe's four-year tenure at MSU. The Spartans, who were 26-7 and captured their second-straight conference crown in 1996, must replace four-year starters and First-Team All-Americans Dana Cooke and Val Sterk.

"This is, without a doubt, our finest recruiting class in the last four years," Erbe said. "It's coming at a good time, with the loss of our two All-Americans, Dana and Val, who laid the foundation for this program. This incoming class, with their work ethic, commitment and athleticism, will help fill the void left by Dana and Val and they will also be a springboard to excellence for Michigan State volleyball over the next four years.

"This could also be the top recruiting class in the nation because of its depth, experience and future potential."

Recruiting tends to go in cycles, because the prospects each year are keenly aware of the current composition of every team they're interested in—especially who's graduating and what starting spots are opening up. Let's face it—most players want to be four-year starters. This gives a recruiting edge to teams where there are several starting spots up for grabs.

A top player may have a dozen schools pursuing her, so she has the luxury of looking at many factors, including the number of likely holes in the starting lineup. The spots being vacated by Dana and Val gave MSU certain advantages in recruiting for 1997.

"There are only a few schools, such as Stanford and Nebraska, where you don't see this type of cycle in recruiting", says Coach Erbe. "Those schools have established themselves as places where the top players will go simply to be part of a superior program, regardless of their chances of being an immediate starter. We hope that Michigan State will soon be in the same category."

Meet the Recruits

Sarah Gustin, a 6-3 middle from Hesperia, Calif., is a Second-Team High School All-American and Fab 50 selection by Volleyball Magazine. A four-year letterwinner and class valedictorian at Hesperia Christian, she was the California Interscholastic Federation (C.I.F.) Player of the Year in 1996. A three-time league MVP, she was named the San Bernardino Sun County Player of the Year in 1996 and the Daily Press Volleyball Player of the Year in 1996.

Being a high-profile player from California, Sarah was highly sought after by many schools, including UCLA, Stanford, and Penn State. Her first campus visit was to MSU, and it turned out to be her only one. That one trip was enough to convince her she wanted to be a Spartan.

Sarah earned All-America honors for the Asics Tiger Volleyball Club (Santa Fe Springs, Calif.) last season. She now plays for the Nike Ichiban Volleyball Club (Long Beach, CA), the defending Junior Olympic National Champions

(18-and-under).

"Sarah has more than been discovered on a national level," Erbe said. "She is the potential heir apparent to Val Sterk. She has a similar background to Val, with the size, athleticism and intelligence we want in the middle position. Sarah is another potential All-American for Michigan State."

Christie Landry, is a 6-2 outside hitter from Naperville, Ill. She was a three-time all-state and four-year all-conference honoree at St. Francis of Wheaton High School, where she recorded 62 aces this year with her rocket jump serve. She was the 1996 Chicago Sun Times Player of the Year as a senior, and earned Honorable Mention High School All-America honors from Volleyball Magazine.

The National Honor Society member is also a Volleyball Magazine Fab 50 selection. Christie plays for Sports Performance, one of the top volleyball clubs in the nation. She is a two-time USA Volleyball All-American for the perennial national contenders.

She was named honorary captain of the 1996 all-area (DuPage County) volleyball team. In earning this award, she follows in the footsteps of previous captains Terri Zemaitis (1992, 1993), Jenna Wrobel (1994), and Tracey Marshall (1995).

"Christie is the best high school volleyball player in the nation," Erbe says. "She has highly developed skills and has the best understanding of the game of volleyball at this age that I've ever seen. She will make immediate contributions to the program and is another potential All-American for Michigan State."

Christie's father, Joe, is 6-6 and played basketball for the University of Detroit.

Jessica Sanborn was, by all indications, headed for UCLA. The college recruiting article in the April issue of Volleyball magazine even reports her as having signed with UCLA, but she apparently made a last-minute decision to join the Spartans instead.

Jessica is a 6-2 middle from Colbert, Washington and a Volleyball Magazine Fab 50 selection. A three-year letterwinner at Mead High, she guided the Panthers to a regional title in 1996. A National Honor Society member, she earned first-team

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all-league and league MVP honors as a senior.

Jessica is a member of the Inland Empire Volleyball Club (Sandpoint, ID) that captured the 1995 regional championship and qualified for the open division nationals twice.

"Jessica is the icing on the cake in this recruiting class," says Erbe. "She has a tremendous competitive attitude and she is just beginning to scratch the surface of her potential. I feel she will be a future leader and potential All-American in our program."

Maren Witzel, a 6-0 middle from Palmer, Alaska, rounds out the Spartan recruiting class. She is a four-year letterwinner at Colony High where she was a first-team all-region honoree as a junior. She has guided the Knights to a record of 63-13 heading into her final season. She has played for the Midnight Sun Volleyball Club 18-and-under elite team for three years.

Maren, who recently guided her basketball team to a state championship, is a member of the National Honor Society, the Spanish National Honor Society and has been a member of the student government for four years.

"Maren is potentially the best athlete of this class, but is the least known on a national level," Erbe said. "She is a great athlete with an excellent competitive demeanor, who has a great future at Michigan State."

Two Spring Tournaments Mean March (Volleyball) Madness

For the first time, MSU will host two spring invitational volleyball tournaments in 1997. On March 22 most of the media attention will be on the Breslin Center for the boy's high school basketball championships, but volleyball fans will gravitate toward Jenison Field House. The event will be a four-team tournament with guests Notre Dame, Northern Illinois, and Western Michigan.

The tentative schedule for March 22 is as follows:

	Court 1	Court 2
9 am	MSU vs. NIU	ND vs. WMU
10 am	MSU vs. ND	WMU vs. NIU
11 am	MSU vs. WMU	NIU vs. ND
1 pm	1 st vs. 4 th semi	2 nd vs. 3 rd semi
2 pm	championship	3 rd place

A week later, on March 29, fans will get a special treat as the recent Spartan alumni field a team for the second tournament. Although the exact lineup is not set yet, the team is expected to feature this year's seniors Val Sterk and Dana Cooke, as well as Courtney DeBolt, Sarah Blakely, Andrea Pollard, and Andrea DeLuca. They may even be joined by some former opponents, such as ex-Ohio-State star Jenny Jackson.

This will be a larger tournament, featuring a total of six teams, and will be all round-robin, with no championship playoffs. In addition to the alumni, the visitors will all be from Michigan—University of Michigan, Eastern Michigan, Northern Michigan, and Central Michigan.

The tentative schedule for March 29 is as follows:

	Court 1	Court 2
9 am	MSU vs. CMU	U-M vs. EMU
10:30 am	MSU vs. Alumni	U-M vs. NMU
12 noon	CMU vs. Alumni	EMU vs. NMU
2 pm	U-M vs. Alumni	CMU vs. NMU
3:30 pm	MSU vs. EMU	NMU vs. Alumni
5 pm	MSU vs. U-M	CMU vs. EMU

The Spartans have two additional tournament appearances scheduled following these home dates. On April 5, they will play at Kent University in Kent, Ohio. This will be an 8-team event, featuring mostly Eastern teams that MSU doesn't normally play. They will close out the spring season on April 12 with a tournament at Illinois State University in Normal, Illinois.

Experimental Rules

The volleyball world continues to try out new scoring systems. Some of this experimentation will be on view during MSU's spring tournaments.

Rally Scoring

For the March 22nd round-robin play, all scoring will be point-per-play, or "rally" scoring. Games will be played to a winning score of 30 points. Teams will play two games against each opponent.

For the afternoon playoffs, the scoring will be conventional 15-point games. If each team wins one game, the team with the most total points will win the match. If they are tied in points, a rally-scoring game to 11 will decide the victor.

On March 29th, each team will play three games against each opponent, hence the longer hour and a half intervals between scheduled matches. The first two games will be conventional scoring, but the third game will be rally scoring to 30 points.

The 30-point rally-scoring format has been tested internationally for several years. One advantage of this format is that it makes the length of a match more predictable, since it eliminates long stretches of side outs where the score does not advance.

Another major argument given for rally scoring is to attract more fans who are accustomed to other sports. Proponents claim that the current scoring system is "unsatisfying" to fans of the traditional spectator sports such as baseball and basketball. Their argument is that a player can make a great kill or block to end a play, yet her team will not get a point because the opponents served. On the very next play, she can make the identical kill, and this time score a point, simply because the serve has changed hands. They say this is a flaw in the scoring, because the same play should earn the same award regardless of when it occurs.

Others say that this very difference is part of the appeal of volleyball, and that the sports world is all the better for having a variety of sports. To homogenize our sports so that they all have the same feel tends to make each one worth just a little bit less. In addition, most of us are at least somewhat familiar with such sports as badminton,

racquetball and handball. These use the same score-when-serving system as volleyball, so it's not a completely foreign concept to potential fans.

Nevertheless, volleyball continues to experiment with rally scoring. The professional Team Cup matches in Los Angeles used a variation of this where they switched to regular scoring when one team reached 27 points, so that a game could not be won simply by siding out. Rally scoring to 30 has been used in several international tournaments over the last few years, and the FIVB is apparently still considering it as a possible format for the future.

Two-Point Shot

Also for the March 29th tournament, it has been proposed that a two-point shot be used during the rally-scoring games. Two points would be awarded for a kill from the back row. The decision on whether to use this rule will be made by the coaches the morning of the tournament.

Basketball is again given as a model for the two-point shot. The three-point basket has been a success with both players and fans, and some now feel that there should be a similar award for a more difficult or spectacular play in volleyball.

In September, 1996, a match played in Grand Rapids between the men's teams of the U.S. and Japan used some highly experimental rules, which included a two-point shot. For the men's game, it was felt that conventional back row kills are too common to merit extra points, so they added the requirement that the player had to both take off from and land behind the attack line in order to earn the extra point.

In this match, there were six two-pointers scored, but most of them were unspectacular or mis-hits that simply managed to find their way to the floor. Only a couple were what most fans would think of as extra-point-worthy. It was also apparent that the referees had some trouble ascertaining the landing spot of the player, since they also had to watch the path of the ball itself and the blockers at the net.

There are a number of other potential extra-pointers that could be considered, such as an ace or block that hits the floor untouched, or a kill that hits inside

the three-meter line untouched. Of course, the extra-point shot makes sense only in combination with rally scoring. With conventional scoring, it simply creates a sticky situation: what do you do for an extra-point shot that results in a side out—give the team both a side out and a point?

Team Notes

National Team Tryouts

Val Sterk and Courtney DeBolt will be heading to Colorado Springs, Colorado on March 14 in hopes of taking a big step forward in their volleyball careers. On that weekend, new U.S. head coach Mick Haley will be conducting tryouts for the U.S. national team at the Olympic Training Center.

As one part of their preparation, Val and Courtney have been participating in spring practice with the Spartans. They spent spring break in Philadelphia working with former MSU volleyball strength coach Steve Morgan, and then returned to campus for a final week of practice before leaving for Colorado.

In addition, Dana Cooke has been in touch with Doug Reimer, the head coach of Canada's national women's team. She expects to go to Winnipeg, Manitoba in May for the team tryouts.

These are the first Spartan players that we know of to try out at the national level, and we certainly wish them well.

Spring Practice

MSU's spring practice started February 23, and will run through April 12. Assistant Coach Doug Tully said that they try to end practice two weeks before finals, to make sure the players have time to refocus on classes before the semester ends.

Each school chooses its own dates for spring training, within limits set by the NCAA. Schools using a term system, such as Ohio State, generally schedule their spring season several weeks later than MSU.

Injury Update

Unfortunately there isn't any good news yet about Julie Pavlus' back problems. Toward the end of last season, she was plagued with back spasms that sometimes caused her tremendous pain both on and

off the court. Her doctor has now put her in a back brace for seven weeks to try to ease the problem.

Following in Chuck's Footsteps?

A couple of MSU alumni players are trying their skills at high school coaching. Sarah Blakely is coaching the freshman team at Lansing Sexton High School, while Courtney DeBolt is coaching the freshmen at Haslett High School.

1997 Schedule

The back of this issue contains the tentative schedule for MSU's upcoming season. One notable change in the schedule is that Penn State and Ohio State are not traveling partners this year. Splitting up these two will eliminate the make-or-break weekends that resulted from the usual Friday/Saturday matches against these formidable opponents.

Another change is that MSU is this year's rover team—the one out of eleven that isn't paired up with another team for road matches and home matches. The only noticeable effect of this is that we won't have the two usual mid-week Big Ten matches.

1996 Player Awards

The following awards were presented at the Spartan Volleyball Banquet on February 2:

Goff Most Valuable Player	Val Sterk
Andrea DeLuca Spirit Award	Kelly Penney
Hitting Efficiency	Val Sterk
Captain's Award	Dana Cooke
Top GPA	Julie Pavlus
"Over the Net" Award	Mike Ward
SideOut Club Seventh-Player Award	Corie Richard

The Seventh Player award is a new one this year, intended to be an award from the fans, and given by the SideOut Club. It honors a non-starting player who made significant contributions to the success of her team.

A couple of the other winners were especially noteworthy. Julie Pavlus repeated as the honoree for top GPA with a 4.0 average. Val Sterk led the entire nation in hitting percentage for 1996, a sure route to repeating as MSU's hitting efficiency leader.

Tentative 1997 Schedule

(All home matches are played in Jenison Field House)

8/29-30	Goff-MSU Classic (USC, Duke, Xavier)	
9/5-6	MSU Invitational (Drake, Duquesne, Bowling Green)	
9/12-13	@Santa Barbara Judy Bellomo Classic (UCSB, LMU, Arizona St., Portland St.)	
9/19-20	@Kentucky Invitational	
9/26	WISCONSIN	7:00 pm
9/27	ILLINOIS	7:00 pm
10/3	@Michigan	
10/4	@Northwestern	
10/10	@Purdue	
10/11	@Ohio State	
10/17	IOWA	7:00 pm
10/18	MINNESOTA	7:00 pm
10/24	@Indiana	
10/25	@Penn State	

10/31	NORTHWESTERN	7:00 pm
11/1	MICHIGAN Jam Jenison III	7:00 pm
11/7	OHIO STATE	7:00 pm
11/8	PURDUE	7:00 pm
11/14	@Illinois	
11/15	@Wisconsin	
11/21	@Minnesota	
11/22	@Iowa	
11/28	PENN STATE	7:00 pm
11/29	INDIANA	7:00 pm

12/3	NCAA 1 st round
12/5	NCAA 2 nd round
12/12-13	NCAA Regionals
12/18	NCAA Semifinals Washington State University
12/20	NCAA Championship Washington State University



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