
THE SERVICE LINE

Volleyball News from the MSU SideOut Club
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October 1998

A New Year, A New Team, A New Start

All Aboard for Ann Arbor!

Your Club is venturing into the travel business again this year, sponsoring a Spartan volleyball bus trip on October 7th to the University of Michigan. Get fired up for the match by riding down with a bunch of enthusiastic friends (and soon-to-be friends)!

This is more than just another match, as Michigan's team is hot this year, and you can bet they want to hold onto the State Pride flag they won last year.

Sign up early, as there are fewer than 50 spots available on our bus, nicknamed Big Green. The price will be \$13 per person for SideOut Club members; \$18 for non-members. This includes the cost of transportation and admission to the match.

The bus will leave from the parking lot at Farm Lane and Mount Hope Roads promptly at 5:30 pm on October 7th, so be sure to arrive with time to spare.

You can sign up for the trip at the SideOut Club merchandise stand, or call Jim Ellis at 323-3566.

If this is successful, the Club may consider another bus trip to the match in Grand Rapids on 10/28, or possibly some future out-of-state trips.

"One of the big things we've got working for us right now is team chemistry." That was Chuck Erbe's reaction after Spartan volleyball's decisive victory over Notre Dame to win the MSU Invitational Tournament without losing a single game.

Chemistry and cohesion were something that last year's Spartans struggled for and never quite achieved. Fans who attended both of the first two home tournaments this year could even see a significant improvement in two week's time.

Fans were also pleased at the team's ability to come from behind and win. Sarah Gustin commented "That's something I don't think we ever did last year. If we got down very far, we just wound up losing." This year's team is showing the resolve to ignore the score, and just go out and make the big plays. In the nine games MSU won during the tournament, the team was behind late in the game four times, by as much as 8-13, and rallied to win all four games.

It's also a matter of individuals making outstanding personal efforts. "Effort is infectious", says Chuck, citing a particular dig where Jennifer Stroffe came out of nowhere to save a ball. "It breeds desire in other players to contribute in the same way."

Three Positions May be Settled

It appears that three starters—Christie Landry, Jenna Wrobel, and Sara Gustin—are pretty well established.

"Christie is developing very well at setter; she's made a tremendous jump since last week", Chuck said after the tournament. "As a result, the team has the most consistency in hitting it has had in two years."

Christie is also an offensive force, in more ways than one. Most obviously, she is the tallest setter MSU has ever had, and also the best hitter. The crowds love it when Jennifer Stroffe has to handle the set, and, instead of lofting it over to the left side, feeds the ball to the right, where Christie pounds it down.

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Get the Coach's View of Things

The beginning of the Big Ten season also means that fans get their chance to hear about MSU volleyball directly from the coach.

Don't Miss the Coach's Luncheons

Saturday, September 26 marks the return of the coach's luncheon, one of the more informative events sponsored by the SideOut Club. Those who have attended previous luncheons have remarked on how open and candid Coach Erbe is in discussing the team's progress and in responding to whatever questions you might want to ask.

A luncheon is scheduled before every Big Ten home Saturday match, plus one for the Wednesday, November 4th matchup with Michigan. Luncheons are held at Reno's East on Abbott Road just north of Saginaw in East Lansing, starting at 11:30 am. The price, covering food and soft drinks, will be \$6 for SideOut Club members and \$9 for non-members.

The Chuck Erbe Show on Television

The Chuck Erbe show starts an 11-week run on Sunday, September 27 at 11:30 am on WLNS-TV channel 6. This will be the third season for the nation's only coach's show for women's volleyball. Hosted by Ken Landau and Spartan coach Chuck Erbe, the show recaps each weekend's matches, includes team features, and reports the latest information on the MSU volleyball program.

The Service Line

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New Team (continued from page 1)

In addition, Chuck suggests that you watch for subtle things Christie does with her body language to disguise where the set will go, and thus to fake out the opposing blocker. He praises her quick hands, which give the opponents less time to react to each set.

Jenna Wrobel could be headed for an All-American year for 1998. She's already racking up the honors, with MVP awards at both of MSU's tournaments. We'll even go out on a limb here and say that on September 21, the day after this newsletter is printed, her performance at the MSU Invitational will earn her the Big Ten Player of the Week award. The keys for Jenna will be how well she connects with Christie's setting and whether she can control the wildness that can creep into her hitting. What's on her mind this week? —"I can't wait for the Big Ten to start!"

One of the intriguing aspects of a young team is watching the players improve, and Sarah Gustin has been getting better as we watch. At the MSU Invitational she hit a Val-Sterk-like .409 percentage for the weekend, with only eight hitting errors in nine games. Sarah always appears very intense and focused at the net, intently watching what develops on the other side. She is also being used as a passer in at least one rotation this year.

Others Have More Competition

The other three positions—the right side, the other middle (M2), and the other left side (L2)—may not be quite as locked in yet. As Chuck said after the first match of the tournament, "We're waiting to see who can take ownership of these positions."

As of this writing, it looks as though Jennifer Strofte, Jessica Sanborn, and Erin Hartley will be the starters, but Chuck is really pleased to have strong backup players at every position. "This is the most depth I have had on a team in my coaching career, and I find that it actually makes my job more difficult. I have to be a better coach, to make the right decision as to what combination belongs on the court."

On the left side of the court, Erin Hartley is very athletic, with a powerful arm swing, but is having some trouble hitting past collegiate-level blockers. She needs to improve her approach and develop an earlier swing. According to Chuck, "When Erin gets it together, she will be a great player". Tammy

Vonderheide is still in the running for this spot, but may again be seen primarily in the back row.

On Jessica Sanborn, he says "She has the potential to be a great system hitter in the middle". She needs to improve her blocking mechanics and court sense. Maren Witzel has started a number of games at M2, and Chuck sees blocking as her best skill right now.

Jennifer Stroffe appears poised on the right side, adding the maturity and stability that could be crucial to this year's team. We can certainly expect to see Jenny Whitehead share time at this position, especially in situations where the team needs her dominating size and power.

Vicki Basil may not have many opportunities to start, but she will play a critical backup role. According to Chuck, it's difficult to run a competitive program with less than three setters; having a quality second setter is especially crucial. Chuck will rely on Kelly Penney as a primary back-row specialist, where she extends rallies by making important digs.

Areas for Further Development

So, where are the Spartans looking to improve?

"We need to sustain our energy level on the court, eliminating the lulls we are prone to", replies Chuck. Opponents in the Big Ten will be much too tough for MSU to play at less than 100%. Christie Landry's strategy may be a good one: "I try not to think about my actual setting. The more I think about it, the more likely it is to go away."

Passing also needs improvement. The team spent a lot of time on this recently, as it had become a major hindrance to getting a top performance. Accurate passing is especially important with an inexperienced setter. One of the most valuable skills a setter can have is the ability to make a perfect set out of a bad pass, but this is a talent that takes time to develop.

"The team needs to cover blocks better", Chuck continues. If they can keep just a few additional opponents' blocks from hitting the floor, it not only has an immediate impact on the score, but perhaps more importantly gives everyone on the team a psychological boost.

Although the coach is generally pleased with the outside hitting after three weeks, his system requires

that the offense become more diverse, by getting more sets to the middle. The team will definitely be dealing with this in practice, but for it to work in a game, the middle hitters will have to gain consistency. "It's difficult to win matches when on any given night one or the other of your middles is likely to have a bad night", insists Chuck.

The Big Ten—Best in the Nation!

Big Ten volleyball achieved a new milestone the week of September 15, with complete domination of the national USA Today/AVCA Coaches' Poll. The Big Ten was represented by:

- ◆ 2 teams in the top 10, including #1 Penn State,
- ◆ 6 teams in the top 25, and
- ◆ 8 teams in the top 30.

This was a better showing by far than any other conference in the nation, showing how far the quality of Big Ten volleyball has come in the last few years.

Wasn't That A Double Hit?...

Every year **THE SERVICE LINE** has an article about what are usually minor rules changes for the current season. Three years ago, in the midst of the minor changes, we told you about a change in ball-handling rules for international volleyball, with the warning that this change would come to college women's volleyball in a few years. Well, 1998 is the year for it.

If you've attended a match this fall, you may already have noticed that players are now more likely to receive serve or play other balls coming from the opponents with an overhand setting motion, rather than a bump. In the past, if a player used such finger action to play a ball, she would likely have been whistled for a fault, because it is very difficult to use strictly simultaneous finger contact in such a play.

This is no longer a risk for players, since the newly relaxed rules allow multiple contacts (a "double-hit") during a single attempt to play any ball coming from the other side of the net. It is still illegal to lift or carry the ball even in these circumstances.

A block is not considered one of the three team contacts, so the relaxed rule applies to the first team member to play the ball even if it touches one of her blockers on its way over the net.

The old standards still apply to all subsequent plays of the ball, so, for example, a setter may still be whistled for a double hit if the referee sees non-simultaneous contact during the set.

It used to be that this type of play was one of the things that distinguished "backyard" or unskilled volleyball from "real" volleyball. Most volleyball fans consider this an ugly hit, and will need a period of adjustment while they learn to accept it as legal. The technique is still not allowed in high school competition, so most players coming to college have been coached not to play the ball this way.

Chuck confirms that Michigan State has been practicing spike digs this way, but still handles serves the old-fashioned way. "I'm still convinced that the best way to handle serves is the underhand bump."

...And Other Rules Changes

◆As we reported to you in March, the limitation of three entries per player per game has been eliminated, although teams are still limited to 12 total substitutions. There is an experimental rule allowing up to 15 substitutions, which will be in effect only if both coaches agree to it prior to the match. MSU has already taken full advantage of this change in at least one game, against Notre Dame.

◆Under certain limited circumstances, a player's foot or hand may now legally contact the opponent's court completely on the other side of the center line. For this to be legal, the contact must not present a safety hazard to or interfere with the opponents, and must not be a significant distance beyond the line.

The rule change is intended to cover situations such as a setter near the net who changes direction suddenly to get to a bad pass. This often causes the setter's foot to cross the line momentarily. The thinking is that this is a trivial violation, with no real impact on the play, and it is disruptive to the game to stop play for it.

◆Recently, more and more players have taken to rolling their sleeves up all the way to the top of the shoulder. A new rule says that a player must not do this if it interferes with the legibility of her number.

◆If you've paid attention to game protocol, you've noticed that teams have always lined up along the

end line of the court before the start of each game. Now they will do this only prior to the first game; for subsequent games they will proceed directly to their court positions.

Big Ten Volleyball on Television

National and Regional Broadcasts

The Big Ten has again scheduled eleven TV matches for 1998. Most are listed on Fox Sports Chicago, but may not be carried by Fox Sports Detroit, which is more readily available on mid-Michigan cable systems. Two matches will be carried on a delayed basis on ESPN, while our own home finale has been moved to a Sunday for live presentation on ESPN2.

The Spartans will be featured in two of the broadcasts, both from Jenison Field House. In addition, Fox Sports Chicago has left one slot open for the last weekend of the season. There is a good chance that the MSU/Wisconsin match at Madison will be the most important match that weekend, so the Spartans may make a third TV appearance.

As of September 15, the schedule was as follows (all times Eastern p.m.):

Date	Match	Cable	Time
10/3	Michigan @ Indiana	FOXC	8:00
10/10	Wisconsin @ Penn State	FOXC	7:30
10/17	Illinois @ Iowa	FOXC	8:00
10/18	Northwestern @ Minnesota	ESPN	12:30am (tape)
10/23	Ohio State@Northwestern	FOXC	8:00
10/31	Purdue @ Ohio State	FOXC	7:00
11/7	Penn State @ Wisconsin	ESPN	12:30am (tape)
11/13	Indiana @ Iowa	FOXC	8:00
11/20	Penn State@MSU	FOXC	7:00
11/22	Ohio State@MSU	ESPN2	~1:00
11/27	or 11/28, match to be chosen	FOXC	TBA

Local Broadcasts

Three home matches, on October 24, October 31, and November 4 will be broadcast on local cable. Media One in Lansing is taking the lead on these, but it is likely they will be carried by TCI as well. Check

your local TV schedule or call your cable company for channel information.

NCAA Championship Increases to 64 Teams

At its August 11 meeting, the NCAA Board of Directors approved the expansion of the Division I women's volleyball championship to 64 teams. Members of the volleyball community see the move as a well-deserved recognition for the growth and popularity of women's volleyball.

More than 90 percent of all Division I schools compete in women's volleyball. It is hoped that the increase in championship opportunities will encourage them to enhance their commitments to building high-level programs and thus help to elevate volleyball to the status of a major Division I sport.

Marcia Saneholtz, NCAA Division I volleyball committee chair and senior associate athletic director at Washington State University, says "With 64 teams, first round byes will be eliminated, which puts all teams at the starting gate at the same time. I think we'll probably see more upsets, and that's a healthy thing because it's indicative of greater parity. As the bracket becomes more competitive, increased interest and enthusiasm will be generated for women's collegiate volleyball."

As recently as 1993, only 32 teams participated in post-season play. The tournament was increased to 48 teams in 1994, and then to 56 teams last year.

Michigan State Attendance Down in 1997; Big Ten Back On Top

Michigan State volleyball ranked 14th in home attendance among Division I schools for 1997. This is, of course, a good showing, but it is down from the 6th-place performance of 1996, due to a drop of about one-third in the number of fans at matches.

Complete totals were not available for all conferences, but it appears that the Big Ten regained the attendance crown, with over 230,000 through the turnstiles. The Big Ten dominated the top ten places, with four schools making that list, as well as the top twenty, with six. Wisconsin, Penn State, and Ohio State all showed large increases over 1996.

	Team	Matches	Total	Avg.
1	Hawaii	18	129,622	7,201
2	Nebraska	17	60,551	3,562
3	Wisconsin	18	62,227	3,457
4	Illinois St.	16	41,899	2,619
5	Penn St.	17	42,329	2,490
6	Stanford	17	37,437	2,202
7	Texas	15	32,757	2,184
8	Florida	19	40,646	2,139
9	Minnesota	12	25,627	2,136
10	Illinois	14	27,465	1,962
11	Long Beach	20	37,734	1,887
12	Pacific (Cal.)	14	25,151	1,797
13	Kansas St.	14	22,205	1,586
14	Michigan St.	16	24,451	1,528

Where Are They Now?

When players and coaches leave the MSU volleyball program, fans often don't hear much about them again. We have tracked some of them down. and in this issue and next we'll tell you what they've been doing since their departure.

Joining the Ranks of Head Coaches

It might seem contradictory to say that Doug Tully left the Spartan volleyball program to become the head volleyball coach at MSU. However, it makes sense when you realize that the MSU in question is Mankato State University, in Mankato, Minnesota.

Mankato State has about 12,000 students and plays volleyball at the Division II level. They compete in 21 varsity sports, including Division I hockey.

When Doug started looking for a job, he was interviewing for assistant coach positions, so he was a little surprised at where he wound up. "I talked to a number of coaches about their openings for assistants, and frequently found that their ideas of how to run a program were just too far away from what I had in mind. I could tell it just wasn't going to work out", says Doug. The opportunity at Mankato State came his way, and it seemed like a good fit.

The Mavericks belong to the North Central Conference, one of the most competitive in Division II. Their conference record last year was 8-8, but they are hoping to improve this year. Middle hitter Cassie Bohning was named the conference co-player of the week in early September, as the team went 3-0 to win the '98 Crossover Tournament they host.

Doug is very busy, but enjoying the job: "There's stress, there's rewards, it's everything Chuck said it was, and more."

A Starter on the National Team...

Val Sterk has probably done more traveling this year than she ever imagined was possible. As starting middle blocker for Team USA, in the first eight months of the year she had already been to Central America, Europe, and Asia (twice). Interspersed with this was a qualifier tournament in Texas, plus two domestic tours.

The inexperienced team has not fared well against opponents, but in spite of recent losses, Val was enthusiastic. "I'm really excited to get back in the gym. We just came off playing the best teams in the world [in the Grand Prix series], we've seen what we need to work on, and the team is motivated to become one of the best. We're looking forward to World Cup in November."

When the team is not on the road, the national team requires about the same hours as a full-time job. "Monday through Friday we're pretty much busy 8 to 5, with practice, weight lifting, speed work and other conditioning. Saturdays we have morning practice; other than that our evenings and weekends are free."

She lives in Colorado Springs, and just moved into a house with teammates Karrie Downey and Jenny Jackson. "The team is really close, and even though we get frustrated at times, the trips are much better than they might be, because we all get along so well."

Val's third housemate was her suitemate at MSU. "It's really fun to have Deb here now, because she helps me to get away from volleyball, which is good for me." Val continues her spiritual life through bible study with some of her teammates, and hopes this winter to participate in Young Life, a Christian

program for high school students that she was active in herself during high school.

...and a National Team Hopeful

If things go well, Val could be joined on the national team by another ex-Spartan, Courtney DeBolt. She is currently in Colorado Springs, rehabbing a knee injury she suffered in May.

She came to the Olympic Training Center in April for her second try at the national team, but got injured during her first week there. It was just a routine play, but she was twisting as she landed, and tore the ACL in her right knee. This is the same injury she suffered in her left knee in 1994.

U.S. Coach Mick Haley suggested she stay in Colorado Springs for surgical repair and rehab, to be followed by further consideration for the team. She's only three months post-surgery now, but is ahead of schedule in recovery. "I've just been able to get back in the gym the last few weeks and do some setting, but can't train hard or compete right now. I should be at full strength by January", she says.

Last fall and winter, Courtney played on a professional team in Holland, which she says was an awesome experience. "It was a great volleyball experience, just being on a foreign team and seeing how they do things differently. The bad part was that it wasn't as high a level of play as I had expected. I thought I would be a young player on the team, and could learn from more experienced teammates, but it turned out I was the experienced one."

Another plus was that she was able to visit five other countries during her time off in Holland, but she also says she loves being in Colorado. She has plenty of options for her career. "If things don't work out with the national team, I wouldn't hesitate to go back to Europe to play again. Eventually, I'm going to get into coaching. But, I've already turned down three coaching offers in order to commit my time towards the national team right now."

A Professional Volleyball Player

Dana Cooke played with Courtney in Holland last year, and has returned there this season to play for Martinus, a competing team in the same league. Although she played middle and right side at MSU, Dana was a left-side hitter last season, and may

continue in that spot. Her new team has six Dutch players and six American players.

Dana was on campus this summer helping Chuck with his volleyball camps. She told the kids there that she enjoys the life of a professional volleyball

player. "We play at night, and there's only one practice a day, in the late afternoon, so I get paid to sleep until noon and play volleyball. What could be better?"

SideOut Club Report

Volunteers Needed

As always, we need lots of volunteers to sell merchandise and raffle tickets during home matches. If you can spare some time to help out (and have some fun to boot) at one or more home matches, please call Jim Ellis at (517) 323-3566.

New MSU Volleyball Spirit Choices

The SideOut Club merchandise committee has been busy during the preseason ordering new fashionable apparel and other attractive merchandise.

New this season are long- and short-sleeve T-shirts available in both green and white with various designs, as well as two different styles of baseball caps. Also, magnetic memo boards, decals and refrigerator magnets have been added.

To get more fan participation and involvement at matches, Coach Erbe suggested "waving" towels, which he had seen at other volleyball events. Following his lead, the SideOut Club is now offering white towels with green **MICHIGAN STATE**

VOLLEYBALL lettering. Fans can show their support by waving these to rally our team to victory.

All of the above merchandise is available at the MSU SideOut Club's merchandise stand, located between the practice court and the playing court.

Thanks to Special Members

The SideOut Club would like to publicly recognize the members who through their membership give extra monetary support for Michigan State women's volleyball. (This list is current as of Sept. 14, 1998.)

Lifetime Members

Chuck and Becky Erbe	Al Jacobs
Denise and Jeff Jones	Mick Kelly
Bob and Kathy Lovell	David Kirkby
Jim and Betsy Pifer	Tom Minnema
Lyle, Jeanne and Cindy Montgomery	Mike Ward

1998-99 Supporting Members

Thom Law & Rita Richardson	Jim Johncox
Jeff and Sharron McDonald	Kate Weldon
John and Frances Quinn	

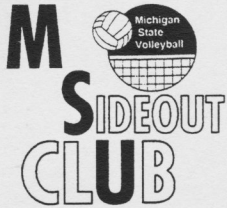
SideOut Club Calendar for 1998

Date	Event	Location	Time
Saturday, September 26	Coach's Luncheon	Reno's East, East Lansing	11:30 am
Wednesday, October 7	Bus Trip to Michigan Match	Farm Lane & Mount Hope Roads	5:15 pm
Saturday, October 10	Coach's Luncheon	Reno's East, East Lansing	11:30 am
Saturday, October 24	Coach's Luncheon	Reno's East, East Lansing	11:30 am
Saturday, October 31	Coach's Luncheon	Reno's East, East Lansing	11:30 am
Wednesday, November 4	Coach's Luncheon	Reno's East, East Lansing	11:30 am
Saturday, November 21	Coach's Luncheon	Reno's East, East Lansing	11:30 am
Sunday, January 23	Spartan Volleyball Banquet	Hawk Hollow Golf Course	TBD

1998 Schedule and Results

(All home matches are played in Jenison Field House)

9/4	W	Eastern Michigan	15-6, 15-7, 15-11	10/23	IOWA	7:00 pm
9/5	W	Central Michigan	15-5, 15-5, 15-9	10/24	WISCONSIN	7:00 pm
	W	Pittsburgh	15-13, 15-3, 11-15, 15-4	10/28	Western Michigan (at Van Andel Arena, Grand Rapids)	7:00 pm
9/11	L	Louisville	15-13, 4-15, 4-15, 15-9, 10-15	10/30	NORTHWESTERN	7:00 pm
9/12	W	Murray State	15-5, 8-15, 15-4, 15-9	10/31	INDIANA	8:00 pm
		MCSA Russia (exhibition, loss 0-3)		11/4	MICHIGAN	7:00 pm
9/18	W	Utah	15-12, 15-9, 16-14	11/6	@Minnesota	7:00 pm
9/19	W	New Hampshire	15-7, 15-4, 15-10	11/12	@Purdue	7:30 pm
9/19	W	Notre Dame	15-6, 15-13, 15-11	11/14	@Illinois	7:00 pm
9/25		ILLINOIS	7:00 pm	11/20	PENN STATE	7:00 pm
9/26		PURDUE	7:00 pm	11/22	OHIO STATE	1:00 or 1:30 pm
10/2		@Indiana	7:00 pm	11/27	@Wisconsin	7:00 pm
10/3		@Northwestern	7:00 pm	11/28	@Iowa	7:00 pm
10/7		@Michigan	7:00 pm	12/3-6	NCAA - 1 st and 2 nd Round	
10/10		MINNESOTA	7:00 pm	12/10-13	NCAA Regionals	
10/16		@Ohio State	7:00 pm	12/17-19	NCAA Final Four in Madison, Wisconsin	
10/17		@Penn State	7:30 pm			



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