
THE SERVICE LINE

Volleyball News from the MSU SideOut Club
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The Toughest Team in the Big Ten? Then Let's Start Winning!

Chuck Erbe was recently the recipient of an unexpected compliment, relayed via Ohio State coach Jim Stone. Stone mentioned that he had asked Penn State's Russ Rose who he thought was the toughest team in the Big Ten. According to Stone, "Russ replied that the toughest team he had faced in the conference this season was Michigan State." High praise for a team with a 6-6 record, especially coming from the coach of the nation's number one team in the polls!

Rose's Nittany Lions played against a Spartan team with a different setter, but that alone can't explain the swings we've seen in the last six weeks. Spartan volleyball has been a series of highs and lows this season, with some dominating victories mixed in with games where the team seems to have forgotten how to play.

Extending the Winning Streak at Illinois

The biggest win came October 22 at Illinois, where the Spartans steam-rolled the #20-ranked Illini 3-0 in front of 1,832 shocked fans. This marked the fifth consecutive year MSU has come home from Champaign with a victory.

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This one was especially sweet because Illinois expected to win it without even breaking a sweat. They had their own biggest win of the season the previous weekend at Minnesota, which led coach Don Hardin to turn cocky. In a post-game interview, he predicted his team would go undefeated until Penn State made their visit to Champaign, at which time the Illini would enjoy an upset win over the Nittany Lions! (Since the loss to MSU, Illinois has also lost 0-3 to Wisconsin.)

Trying to Forget a Streak of Another Kind

On the down side, our consecutive losses to Purdue, Wisconsin, Iowa and Minnesota marked the longest losing streak we've seen since 1993, and dropped the team into tenth place in the conference. The 1-5 start to the conference matches that of 1994, the worst start of Chuck's tenure here. The combined home and away losses to Minnesota hasn't happened since 1993.

Looking at the Bright Side

But there have been other bright spots as well. The 3-0 victory over Michigan virtually guaranteed we will capture the State Pride flag back from U-M this year. Because of the dominant victory in East Lansing, the Spartans only have to win one game or score 21 points to earn the flag. Of course, the team's not thinking that way; their goal will be to win the match in Ann Arbor, as they have done three of the last four years.

Beating Iowa 3-0 at Iowa City after a 2-3 loss to the same team at home was a welcome sign of improvement. The 3-0 win over Northwestern and the 3-1 defeat of Indiana were must-haves, but it was good to see the team win in convincing fashion.

Finding Something That Works

With the team's performance so erratic, we could even see further changes in the lineup when they return home again to host Wisconsin and Purdue.

One possibility would be to put Sarah Gustin opposite the setter and Erin Hartley back on the left side. This would give Sarah a chance to show what she could do in blocking teams that rely on their left side attack. Erin played the left side for the Northwestern match, when Angela Morley was out due to injury, and she had her best hitting match of the season. If the team's lack of confidence is based on still feeling uncomfortable in their new positions, it's possible this would help.

We can also expect to see more of Kyla Smith as a left-side hitter. She shows plenty of promise in individual skills, and as her game skills develop to match, she'll probably get more court time.

Striving to Earn a Tournament Berth

With the Big Ten championship out of reach, the big question on everyone's minds is whether we will make it into the NCAA tournament this year. Barring some major meltdowns in the last eight matches of the season, Penn State, Minnesota, Illinois and Wisconsin are assured of spots in the tournament. MSU will be competing with Ohio State, Purdue, Indiana, and possibly Michigan for a bid.

How many teams from the Big Ten will make it? Last year when the tournament expanded to 64 teams, six squads from our conference were invited. Even with the smaller tournament fields in previous years, there were six bids for the Big Ten in 1995 and 1997. So it seems likely that there will be six again this year.

The one negative factor this year is that the polls aren't showing much respect for the Big Ten. November 2 saw Penn State at the top of the AVCA coaches' poll, followed by Minnesota at number 19. In contrast, last year's final poll had three Big Ten teams in the top 15 and six in the top 25! If the tournament selection committee is thinking along the same lines, the conference could even be back down to five tournament participants, making it even harder for us to get in.

If this should happen, the Spartans may well have to win six of the last eight matches to make it into the tournament, to finish the conference season at 12-8. This would allow for a loss to Penn State, and another possibly to either Ohio State, Wisconsin or Illinois, with victories over everyone else. Even if six Big Ten teams get invitations, MSU will probably have to win five more.

Analysis aside, we can be sure that the coaching staff is heading into every match concentrating on a win. The conference has been volatile enough this season that every team seems potentially vulnerable (with the possible exception of Penn State on their home court).

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Volleyball on the Internet

From talking with SideOut Club members, I know that many of you already use the Internet to keep up with developments in Spartan volleyball and around the nation. You probably have found your own favorite sites, but perhaps I can alert you to a few you haven't seen.

Let's start with one of the newest resources, a mailing/discussion list (sometimes known as a "listserv") designed specifically for Big Ten fans. The list was set up a few months ago by Doug

O'Neal, a Penn State fan I met at last year's NCAA finals in Madison. He describes the list as follows: "This list is for discussion of Big Ten Conference women's volleyball. It's a place where fans of any of the Big Ten teams (or of the conference in general) can discuss the sport. Appropriate topics include (but are not limited to) results of recent matches, discussion of upcoming matches, new recruits, booster-club issues, and updated conference standings. We encourage you to support your favorite team, but without insulting or disparaging their conference opponents."

The list is operated from the web-based discussion-list service called ONElist. To sign up for the list, go to the address:

www.onelist.com/community/bigtenvb

and follow the instructions. When you join the list, you have a choice of receiving each message individually at your email address, receiving a single "digest" email message each day, or reading messages only at the web site.

So far the single greatest feature of this list is that it is the best place to find out Big Ten match results. On Fridays and Saturdays, fans at the various schools report results often within half an hour of the end of a match. By 11 p.m. or midnight the scores from the entire conference are usually in, along with commentary on some of the matches.

Of course the discussions go beyond scores, with the most popular topic being theories about why some teams and players are doing well while others are not. It's just like a bunch of SideOut Club members sitting around talking, but with a different flavor because you get to hear from fans at other schools.

There are currently about 60 participants on the list. Message traffic so far averages only four or five per day, so it's not a great load on your email account. The list is most active on weekends, when there are sometimes as many as fifteen or twenty messages per day.

This is a great resource for Big Ten volleyball fans, so I would encourage all of you to try it out and see what you think.

Of course there are hundreds of web sites devoted to volleyball, so how do you know where to surf?

A great place to start is the SideOut Club web site kurtz.tcimet.net/sideout/. I may be a bit biased, but this is probably the best non-official site for any volleyball team in the entire country. Andy Kurtz has done a great job designing it, and keeps it updated continually with links to news stories, match reports and box scores. He has a gallery of dozens of original photographs, dating back to 1996.

The latest addition to the site is an on-line store, where you can buy SideOut Club merchandise. Most SideOut Club members will probably find it easier to buy in person at the merchandise table, but for those who can't make it to matches, those who live out of state, and for those off-season purchases, we hope this will be a very useful addition.

The SideOut Club site can also guide you to other volleyball sites on the web, via the links page. Most of the pages mentioned below can be accessed from there. I'll tell you my favorite features of each site, but you'll probably find other items of interest to you as you explore them.

The Official MSU Volleyball Site www.fansonly.com/scho/msu-w-volley-body.html

This is the place for reading official releases from MSU Sports Information. They generally have a report and a box score available fairly soon after a match, especially if it's at home.

The USA Today College Volleyball Site www.usatoday.com/sports/volleyba/svcw/svcwd1.htm

This used to be the very best place to find scores for the top matches in the country. Unfortunately, they changed their reporting system this year, and now they always seem to be missing the results from the important matches. Some of the volleyball stories are still noteworthy, but they are now usually only updated on Saturday and Sunday. It's a shame that they couldn't maintain what used to be a great resource.

The Collegiate Volleyball Update

www.cvu.com/wu/

This site is organized much like USA Today's, with some match stories, scores, and the top 25 poll. It has relatively few scores, but they are often from more important matches that are not found on the USA Today site.

Division I Women's Volleyball

www.richkern.com/d1wvb/index.asp

If it's facts and figures you want, this newest collegiate volleyball web site is for you. Rich Kern of Nebraska (another fan I met at last year's NCAA finals) is putting together an incredible array of information about every team in the nation. There is a selection of current results that is as large as the two previously mentioned sites, but including different matches. He also collects the complete weekly results from the AVCA, and allows you to view those sorted in different ways.

The site includes an amazing array of information about every team, including rosters, announced recruits, lists of All-Americans, maps to volleyball arenas, links to college web sites and more. Miguel Ballicora's computer rankings are posted every week, and you can even compare them side-by-side with the coaches' poll. The design of the site has a couple of weaknesses (inability to just browse through all of the information, and lack of any original commentary on the game), but given the amount of time it must take to maintain what is there, this can be excused. A must see.

Big Ten Volleyball

www.bigten.org/sports/vball/index.htm

is good for finding out, usually by Monday night, who is the Big Ten player of the week. It also has a composite schedule for the conference, so you can see at a glance who is playing whom on any given day.

American Volleyball Coaches Association

www.avca.org

There's an interesting assortment of stuff here at several different levels. Look around the home page to see what interests you, then go to The Collegiate Game to look around some more, and then eventually continue to Division I to see the

material most directly relevant to us.

NCAA Volleyball Statistics

www.ncaa.org/stats/volleyball.cgi

The place to look at the current leaders, both team and individual, in various statistical categories, such as kills, blocks, etc.

Team Notes

Christie Landry had surgery to repair her torn ligament, and is already walking with no crutches or brace. Her goal is to be on the court by the end of the month, although it seems unlikely she will play in another match this season.

In spite of the disappointing season, the Spartans have had some undeniably outstanding performances from individuals. During the first eight weeks of the season, three MSU players have won Big Ten Player of the Week awards. No other school has had more than one player to be so honored this year.

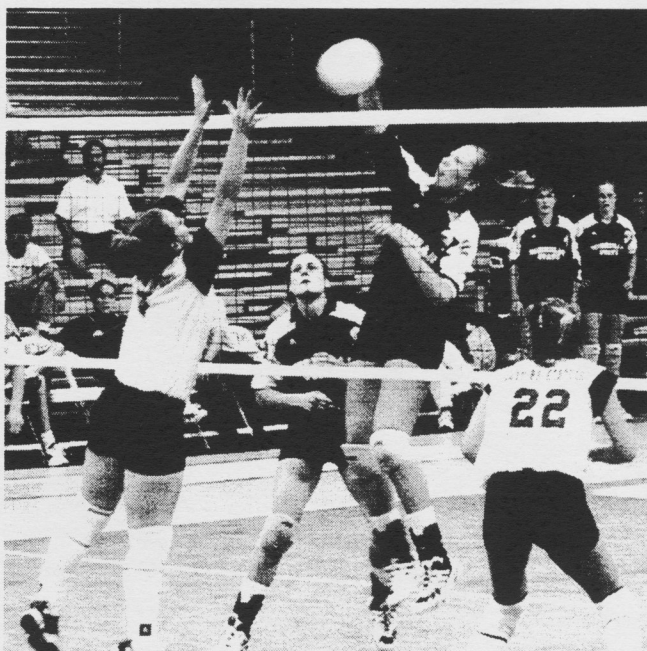


Photo by Andy Kurtz

The most recent went to **Angela Morley** (shown above) on October 25, primarily in recognition of

the blocking clinic she put on against Illinois and Indiana. Angela set an MSU record with 14 blocks against Indiana, and also came up with nine against the Illini. Her hitting was almost as noteworthy, with a hitting percentage of .560 for the weekend. She is the only Big Ten freshman to win the award this year. Chuck says "Angela is agile, intelligent, and has excellent timing on her blocks." She continued her performance the next weekend, hitting .631 against Minnesota and Iowa, where no other Spartan hit over .100

The previous week's Big Ten award went to **Erin Hartley**, for her performances against Michigan and Northwestern. For the week, she hit .604 and averaged a lofty six kills per game.

Jessica Sanborn was the first player this season to win the award, on September 13, for leading MSU to four victories at the UMass tournament.

MSU's **overall hitting percentage** has been setting records this year. Through October 25 they had recorded a team mark of .283, which would be an all-time season high. This was good for 14th highest in the nation.

Volunteer assistant coach **Dominic Yoder** has left the MSU volleyball program. He has been pursuing a graduate degree at Western Michigan University. Due to ongoing responsibilities combined with a new opportunity there, he was left with too little time to continue his work with the Spartans. There is no one lined up to replace him at this time.

Coach's Luncheons at Buddies

Make your volleyball game-day experience complete this year by coming to the SideOut Club Coach's Luncheons. Luncheons will be held on the two remaining Big Ten home Saturdays, November 6 and 20.

The gatherings will take place at Buddies Pub & Grill in East Lansing at 11:30 am. This is located in the Carriage Hills Shopping Center, at the corner of Hagadorn and Lake Lansing Roads. The cost will be \$7 to cover food and soft drinks.

Video Editing on the E.d.g.e.

I was sitting next to Laura Abbinante watching the Spartans play Wisconsin. MSU served the ball, Wisconsin set it to Allyson Ross on their left side, who killed it for a side out. Without pause, MSU served the ball again, Wisconsin made almost the same play, this time dinking the ball for another side out. This scenario was repeated three more times before MSU finally scored a point. Was this some new type of experimental rules we were watching?

Actually, we were sitting in Laura's office watching a game tape made using MSU's brand-new digital editing system, one of the highest tech weapons in the athletic wars. Thanks to your support, the SideOut Club was able to contribute \$4,000 to the considerable cost of the new equipment.

The system is called the Enhanced Digital Game Editor or E.d.g.e for short. It's produced by Schafer Corporation of Chelmsford, Massachusetts (www.schafercorp.com/edge/). Schafer is a highly diverse company that was a pioneer in the use of digital video editing by the U.S. military. They have now applied this technology to athletics for the editing and analysis of video tape to improve team and player performance.

The particular unit purchased for volleyball is a portable one, called "E.d.g.e on the Road", consisting of two components—a professional VCR and a computer. Both components are supplied in rugged cases designed for travel. The computer is not the notebook style of portable that usually comes to mind these days, but instead is shaped more like a very small suitcase. The keyboard, which is stored vertically, detaches from the front of the unit to expose the flat-panel screen, which sits in front of all the components of the computer.

All functions are controlled from the computer, which, in spite of its unusual appearance, is a standard Windows computer that could just as easily be used for word processing or spreadsheets when not busy doing video editing. To operate it, you start Windows and then open the digital

editing software. As you work, the computer monitor becomes the video display, and you control the playback, marking, and editing process using a touch pad through a standard Windows interface.

MSU volleyball has had the system less than two months, and has not had enough time to make full use of it yet. Video editing was a primary responsibility of Dominic Yoder, but with his departure, Laura has tried to squeeze this into her busy days. Chuck says there are plans to bring in company representatives at a later date for a full training session.

One place where it comes into play is analysis of opponents for upcoming matches. The Big Ten has a "tape request" system, whereby each team is required once each season to submit a video tape of a match from the current season to any opponent who requests one. While the tape itself is a useful scouting tool, it is extremely time-consuming to analyze one properly. It requires a very experienced, perceptive, analytical and patient individual to see the strengths, weaknesses, and tendencies that a team may display throughout the course of a match.

With the E.d.g.e system, this becomes much easier. Laura showed me how the system lets you play the tape of the match, and mark each event you are interested in. Probably the simplest use is to mark the point where the team in question serves the ball or receives serve, as well as the moment the ball becomes dead. With an experienced operator, this can be done in little more than the time it takes to play the tape. As you do this, the tape is being recorded onto the hard drive of the computer.

Once the marking is done, you can make custom edited versions of the match. Assuming you marked the recording as described above, you could then play the match back with plays grouped together by rotation. That is what was happening as I described in the opening paragraph, where we watched Wisconsin receive serve and attempt to side out over and over again in the same rotation. By breaking the game down this way, you can

determine how each player performs and what types of plays the team tends to use in that particular rotation.

For example, Laura spoke about an opposing team they had examined this way a few weeks ago. From watching the tapes, it became clear that a particular player could pass serves very well in some rotations, but consistently made errors in other rotations. Further observation showed that when she was in the back row, presumably focusing on nothing but passing, she passed great. After moving to the front row, her passing deteriorated considerably, probably because she was thinking ahead to the attack she would have to make. This simple observation became a part of MSU's game strategy—serve to her when she's in the front row, serve to someone else when she's in the back row.

The E.d.g.e system allows plays to be broken down in much more detail than this. Each individual play of the ball can be categorized as to the player who makes it and the type of play (pass, set, attack, block, dig). Sets and attacks can be further classified as to their height and position along the net (e.g. high to the outside, back quick, slide, etc.).

This type of analysis is probably most useful when applied to one's own team. It makes it possible, for example, to watch every slide that Jessica hits in a match, to evaluate how consistent her form is, where she hits the ball best, whether she can vary the direction of the attack (cross-court, down the line), and more. This can be incredibly helpful to the players and the team as a whole.

Schafer Corporation markets their products to both college and professional sports teams, and can configure them for almost any sport. They have options not only for team sports (including baseball, football, basketball, hockey, field hockey, and more), but also for individual sports such as tennis. The software is really the only difference between a baseball setup and one for volleyball, so the same hardware could even be shared between different sports if their seasons did not overlap.

MSU hockey was one of the first teams to use the system after it was released, which brought it to Chuck's attention. It has also been adopted by a number of volleyball teams, including both the men's and women's teams at Ohio State.

More Volleyball on Cable

AT&T Cable Services of Lansing (channel 17) and East Lansing (channel 13) will continue their broadcasts of MSU home volleyball matches, as shown by the following schedule:

Match (broadcast live on both systems)	Replay Dates (Lansing only)
Wisconsin, November 5	11/6, 4:00 pm 11/12, 7:00 pm
Purdue, November 6	11/10, 8:00 pm 11/12, 9:00 pm
Indiana, November 19	11/20, 4:00 pm 11/22, 7:00 pm
Illinois, November 20	11/21, 4:00 pm 11/24, 7:00 pm

Fans who get ESPN2 will also have a couple of chances to see other Big Ten teams in action. The Ohio State vs. Illinois match on November 5 will be shown on ESPN2 on Sunday, November 7 at 2:00 pm. Wisconsin at Penn State on November 26 will be shown on Saturday, November 27 at 2:00 pm.

AT&T Cable Lansing (but not East Lansing) will also carry some other matches from around the Big Ten, courtesy of the Big Ten Network on Fox Sports Chicago. These will also be shown on channel 17.

Match	Broadcast Date
Michigan/OSU, 11/13	11/14, 7:00 pm
Penn State/Iowa, 11/20	11/29, 7:00 pm
Wildcard TBA, 11/27	12/1, 7:00 pm

Other Volleyball Championships Close to Home

Can't fly to Hawai'i for the Division I women's finals in December? You're in luck—a couple of other college volleyball championships will be held only a short drive from East Lansing this year.

December 2-4 will see the women's Division II championship come to Kellogg Arena in Battle Creek. As always for Division II, eight teams will compete, with the quarter-finals on Thursday, semis on Friday, and finals on Saturday. For info, try the Kellogg box office at (616) 965-3308.

The NCAA Men's Volleyball Championships will be held in Fort Wayne, Indiana for 2000. It's hosted by Indiana-Purdue University, Fort Wayne (IPFW), which is the closest school to East Lansing to have a men's varsity volleyball program. The semi-finals will be played May 4, with the finals on May 6, both at the Allen County Memorial Coliseum. The event has a web site at: www.ipfw.edu/athletics/volleyball/ncaamvc.htm and the phone number for the Coliseum is (219) 482-9502.

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 Oct. 29, 1999.)

Lifetime Members

Becky and Chuck Erbe	Al Jacobs
Denise and Jeff Jones Sr.	Mick Kelly
Bob and Kathy Lovell	David Kirkby
Jim and Betsy Pifer	Tom Minnema
Lyle and Jeanne Montgomery	Mike Ward
Lowell McCann	Laura Peters
Al and Kay Schmid	

1999-00 Supporting Members

Craig and Susan Allen	Jenny and John Bond
Nancy Hammond	Jeff and Sharron McDonald
Sarah and Stu Patterson	John and Frances Quinn

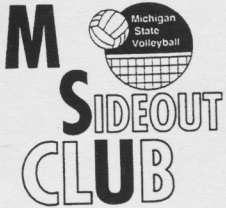
1999 Schedule and Results

(All home matches are played in Jenison Field House)

9/3	W	Cleveland State	15-6, 15-11, 15-3
9/3	L	Texas A&M	15-12, 5-15, 15-9, 3-15, 10-15
9/4	W	Eastern Kentucky	15-4, 15-1, 15-11
9/4	L	Clemson	3-15, 11-15, 7-15
9/10	W	New Hampshire	15-6, 15-8, 15-10
9/10	W	Southern Mississippi	15-3, 15-5, 15-8
9/11	W	Seton Hall	15-1, 12-15, 15-5, 15-3
9/11	W	Massachusetts	15-5, 15-12, 15-11
9/17	W	Depaul	15-8, 15-5, 15-13
9/17	W	Niagara	15-4, 15-0, 15-1
9/18	W	Loyola	8-15, 15-13, 15-4, 15-6
9/18	W	Western Michigan	15-13, 15-9, 15-4
9/24	L	PENN STATE	15-10, 3-15, 5-15, 15-11, 8-15
9/25	W	OHIO STATE	15-13, 15-9, 15-4
10/1	L	Purdue	11-15, 10-15, 13-15
10/2	L	Wisconsin	5-15, 13-15, 4-15
10/8	L	IOWA	15-3, 11-15, 7-15, 18-16, 12-15
10/9	L	MINNESOTA	7-15, 8-15, 6-15

10/13	W	MICHIGAN	15-9, 15-6, 15-5
10/15	W	NORTHWESTERN	15-8, 15-2, 15-2
10/22	W	Illinois	15-9, 15-6, 17-15
10/23	W	Indiana	15-11, 9-15, 15-11, 15-6
10/29	L	Minnesota	6-15, 3-15, 10-15
10/30	W	Iowa	15-11, 15-10, 15-5
11/5		WISCONSIN	7:00 pm
11/6		PURDUE	7:00 pm
11/12		@Ohio State	7:00 pm
11/13		@Penn State	7:30 pm
11/19		INDIANA	7:00 pm
11/20		ILLINOIS	7:00 pm
11/24		@Michigan	7:00 pm
11/27		@Northwestern	7:00 pm

12/2-5 NCAA - 1st and 2nd Round
 12/9-12 NCAA Regionals
 12/16-18 NCAA Final Four in Honolulu, Hawai'i



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