
The Service Line

Volleyball News from the MSU SideOut Club
Vol. IX No. 2
October 2003

Spartan Volleyball Returns Home!

The Spartan volleyball team is finally back home to open the 2003 Big Ten season with what shape up to be two very interesting weeks. Most years one would expect that matches against Penn State, Ohio State, Michigan and Wisconsin would be a huge challenge. However, based on results so far this season, it's hard to know what to expect.

MSU

The Spartans might be mildly disappointed by the losses to Georgia Tech and Nebraska, but the overall results of the pre-conference season are the best we've seen in years. For example, MSU stands alone in the Big Ten as having:

- ◆ three wins over top-25 opponents (North Carolina, Santa Clara and San Diego), and
- ◆ losses only to opponents ranked in the top 15 (Georgia Tech and Nebraska).

No one else, including pre-season favorites Minnesota and Penn State can make this claim.

Not all of MSU's victories have been well-played, but the key is that the squad played well enough to win. Also encouraging is the fact that the distribution of sets to our hitters has been more evenly split than in some previous years, so we don't have to rely too heavily on one or two "big guns".

Four Spartan players have won all-tournament honors this season, including MVP awards for Kim Schram, Jenny Rood, and Nikki Colson. Brooke Langston was the other winner, when she filled in for an injured Megan Wallin at American and came up with an all-tournament performance. Nikki became the first Spartan since Jenna Wrobel in 1997 to be named to four all-tournament teams in one season.

The most fluid position for MSU has been that of left-side hitter, with court time being shared between Kim Schram, Sara Villwock and Diana Steplyk. Kim seems to have the L1 position locked up, with the highest hitting percentage, the most kills per game, and the most blocks per game of the three. It's not clear yet whether Diana and Sara will continue to share the L2 or if one of them will become the regular starter there.

We can expect to see Jenny Rood and Megan Wallin in the middle, but Brooke's performance at American shows that we have outstanding backup available at that position. Michelle Kopka is solid as the opposite hitter.

Marley Bellwood seems to have earned the libero position, with Emmy Miller and Stephanie Knopp subbing in as defensive specialists.

Penn State

The home opener against the Nittany Lions will also be the first televised game of the week under the 2003 Big Ten broadcast contract, this one appearing on Fox Sports Chicago on September 28.

The Nittany Lions lost two of their stars last year, second-team all-American outside hitter Mishka Levy and all-Big Ten honorable mention middle blocker Robyn Guokas. Returning are 2002 Big Ten Freshman of the year setter Sam Tortorello and All-Big Ten senior middle Cara Smith (who was also named the first Big Ten Player of the Week this year). Opposite Smith is freshman Cassy Salyer, who

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at 6-5 is one of the two tallest players in the conference. With junior outside hitter Syndi Nadeau injured, the Nittany Lions have also been starting a second freshman, Ashley Fidler.

PSU's 2003 pre-conference schedule was quite weak, including no top-25 opponents. The only notable result was their loss to unranked Brigham Young. Like MSU, they played American, winning in three.

Ohio State

The Buckeyes have the strangest lineup in the conference this year, starting with the fact that the roster includes only eleven players.

For the first couple of matches, Jim Stone had Heather Whalen and Jackie Schardt, last year's backup setters, filling in for departed All-Big Ten setter Katie Virtue. After an upset by Western Michigan, Stone brought in 6-1 freshman Briana McCarthy to set, making their setter the tallest starter on the team! At the same time, Whalen was moved from setter to outside hitter.

Also notable are two cross-sport athletes. Starting middle blocker D'wan Shackelford is a fifth-year senior who hasn't really played volleyball since 1999 because she was busy winning four varsity letters in basketball. Holly Kram is a 5-3 libero who played previously on the OSU soccer squad. In addition, the Buckeyes have a transfer player from Arkansas who has not yet played this year and a libero from

Sweden.

And of course, Ohio State continues to rely on record-setting numbers of kills and digs from Stacey Gordon, who has been responsible for 40% of the team's attacks this year.

OSU's schedule is also unusual in that they took the first weekend of the season off, playing their first match a week later than everyone else. Their pre-conference schedule was similar to that of Penn State, with no top-25 opponents. Like PSU, the Buckeyes were upset by BYU, in addition to the loss to Western Michigan mentioned above.

Michigan

The Wolverines could be the only team in the Big Ten whose leader in both attacks and kills per game is a middle blocker. That middle blocker is, of course, senior Erin Moore, a member of last year's All-Big Ten team. U-of-M has one of the most experienced squads in the conference, with five starters in their senior academic year, one true junior and one freshman. They've been hanging around the middle ranks of the conference for three years, and would really like to move up to the top three this year.

Accordingly, the Wolverines have played a tougher pre-conference schedule than OSU or PSU, including losses to top-25 teams Louisville and Kansas State. Their best win was an upset over #30 Texas A&M. Just like MSU, they defeated Tennessee in five games.

Wisconsin

The Badgers graduated three starters, including All-Big Ten outside hitter Erin Byrd, and four other players did not return to the team. Even though they will still be led by third-team All-American setter Morgan Shields, the Badgers dropped to number four in the conference in the pre-season coaches' poll.

Lisa Zukowski started the year at her old position of outside hitter, after playing most of 2002 at libero to help her recuperate from a torn ACL. After six matches at outside, Pete Waite decided to move her back to libero, starting the taller Marian Weidner at outside.

Wisconsin's pre-conference schedule included a few

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tough teams, but they couldn't defeat any ranked opponents. They did force Georgia Tech to five games, but lost in only three to Pepperdine and Washington.

★★Volleyball Trivia Question★★

In addition to Penn State's Cassie Salyer, who is the other 6-5 Big Ten player?

SideOut Club Activities for Fall

Tailgate Party—October 18

Do not miss this event! The tailgate last year was great, with many participants, great food and drink, and good friends of MSU volleyball including parents, families and coaches. The team thought it was really special to have our own tailgate, and so will you! Put the date on your calendar now; the match with Northwestern will follow. Details will be available at the SideOut Club table.

Bus Trip to Ohio State

Join us for a great trip to Columbus, Ohio on November 14. Plan now to take the afternoon off and make this trip. The bus will leave about noon and return after the match. Get all the specifics and sign up for this trip at the SideOut Club table at the entrance to Jenison. This match will be a key one as it is near the end of the season.

Coach's Luncheons

Join Coach Erbe and SideOut Club members at Coach's luncheons on:

Friday, September 26 Friday, October 3
Friday, October 31, and Saturday, Nov. 22

Luncheon's are at Damon's East Lansing, 1601 W. Lake Lansing Road near US-127, starting at 11:30 am. The cost is \$10 which includes a meal, non-alcoholic drink, tax and gratuity. If for some reason you are unable to eat, there will still be a place for you.

President's Corner

by SideOut Club President Jenny Bond

If you receive this newsletter, you are a true volleyball fan who has joined the MSU SideOut Club for the 2003-2004 year. We welcome our new and

returning members. You are to be congratulated on recognizing the value of joining our booster club.

SideOut Club members have participated in several special activities since the newsletter. More fans welcomed the team at their first practice session on August 10 than attended the matches before Chuck Erbe arrived on campus. We were very excited to see our returnees and to meet the 2003 class for the first time. During this special event, members were able to talk directly with the team and coaches in a very relaxed environment. The team looked great and brought much excitement to the event. We learned that Nikki Colson has been busy off court as well, as she is currently wearing a beautiful diamond and planning a December, 2004 wedding. My husband John and I had the opportunity to meet Nikki's future in-laws when we attended the tournament in Nebraska. It seemed that we had known them for many years. Nikki appears to have transferred her skill of making wise decisions on the court to this important off-court decision. We understand that her fiancé, who is a professional baseball player in Class A, will be attending some of her matches this season.

Attendance at the Green and White and Alumni Matches was large. The fans were really ready to see volleyball as the last match in Jenison was Thanksgiving weekend, 2002. The teams did not disappoint us.

We have also enjoyed attending several team practices. Remember that Chuck has open practices. John especially enjoys these as it is the best time to see how Chuck tailors his comments to the specific player. It is also an opportunity to appreciate team members who may not be seen on the court in the close matches but who work hard and push the starters every day so they will be ready to face opponents. It was especially good to see some of the less used players in matches in MD and SC and Mickey Davis in Nebraska.

John selected (with my assistance) an excellent present for my recent birthday. What is better than traveling to the tournaments in Maryland, South Carolina and Nebraska in a three week time? What fun to see the team compete in these environments and to perform so well. We learned that this team is

for real! Chuck made a wise decision to expose them to some of the best teams in the country preseason in unfamiliar and, in some cases, very loud environments. I am sure that they were exhausted by the time they returned from Nebraska, but I think their experiences will reinforce their confidence as the Big 10 season unfolds.

It was especially good to see Assistant Coach Daune Koester's grandfather at the Nebraska matches. He came from Kansas and, as you can imagine, was a proud grandpa. In the Maryland facility it was good to see Daune's picture displayed with the outstanding volleyball alums.

I know many of you have enjoyed the broadcasts by John Kreger on www.msuspartans.com. But as good as John is, he cannot relay everything we were able to see when we were in the stands at these tournaments. We were especially pleased to see the maturity and communication the MSU team exhibited—they were by far the best disciplined of the teams we saw in MD and SC, both on and off the court. We also appreciated even more than before the efforts parents make to attend away matches. For example, Megan Wallin's parents came from Florida to MD and it was great to see her father's health improving. The Colsons came from Nebraska to MD and SC. Nikki gave her brother much grief when he teasingly (I think) wore some UNC gear when MSU played UNC—although it was removed before the match actually started. I am not sure what threats she used. SOC sends a huge thanks to the parents for their many contributions to the team.

I found it especially interesting to compare the volleyball facilities at MD, SC and Nebraska with Jenison Field House. It amazes me that the coaches have been able to recruit so well—especially before the renovations of the locker room and other facilities in Jenison. The Maryland facility is only a few years old and is part of the huge Comcast Center which includes MD basketball facilities. Everything is new! The SC facility is also relatively new and the space is dedicated to volleyball during the season. The Nebraska facility is overwhelming-dedicated to

volleyball and with more history than most. In addition to what Peter Morris has described in this issue, I was impressed with the number of trophies and All-Conference and All-American plaques in the lobby. Although the facility is old, it has been renovated with a beautiful court and new bathrooms. All three sites have great scoreboards—two which listed the players and their stats during the match. In the end, however, although I wish we had comparable scoreboards, new bathrooms (my husband said that is a girl thing!), a display area focused on volleyball, a better sound system and backs on the bleachers as SC had, I think Jenison Field House has its special ambience and we can be as loud as the Nebraska crowd when the situation seems appropriate, such as the last time we beat Penn State at MSU. Let's anticipate being able to get really loud after the Sept 26 PSU match.

I felt very proud of the SideOut Club contributions to and presence at MSU volleyball events. Our merchandise table set up is superior to those I observed. Nebraska has many more booster club members than we do and their minimum membership is \$50. However, I am really pleased with the commitment of our members and the fact that our membership increased 10% from 2001 to 2002.

What can you do to support MSU Volleyball? Consider Richard Alban, a SOC member since 2000 who has definitely done his part to support our team and increase attendance. This year I am told that he bought 4 season tickets so that he will always have at least 2 to share with friends and encourage them to become fans. Sounds like a great idea to me. You can do your part by inviting friends to a match. I still insist that our team is one of the best kept secrets in town and the ticket price and team quality guarantee you good value. This season has the potential to be an exciting one. Do not miss out on the opportunity to support—with your participation, time, financial resources and caring—this very special group of young women.

Go Green!

The Referee's Stand

Court Positions and "Overlap"

Everyone knows that volleyball players rotate on the court at every service change, and that the team is divided into a front row of three players and a back row of three players. This issue's column will cover the rest of the rules regarding where players may be on the court, and when.

Every time a team earns a side out, the players on that team must rotate, even for the side out that precedes their first serve of the game. (Up until 1996, U.S. high school rules were different, calling for no rotation following the first side out of the game. This difference often caused confusion among fans seeing higher level-volleyball for the first time.)

At the instant the server contacts the ball, the players on both teams must be positioned properly on the court or the referee will whistle a fault. There are several requirements for proper position. One set of requirements covers where the players must be in relation to the court, and another set covers where they must be in relation to their teammates.

The server, of course, must be outside the court. On a volleyball court, the boundary lines are considered part of the court, so if the server steps on or over the line before contacting the ball, it is a fault. Once the server has contacted the ball, she may enter the court. This is why a player who is jump serving must leave the floor behind the end line, but is allowed to cross the line in the air and land in the court after serving. An additional restriction on the server is that she must serve from within the ten-meter length of the endline, i.e. she cannot be outside the right or left sideline. The referee's signal for a line violation by the server is to point at the line with an open hand.

All other players are required to be inside the court at the moment the ball is served. A player's foot can be on a sideline or on the endline, but may not be even partially outside it.

Probably the most confusing positional rule concerns where players must be relative to their teammates. Violations of this rule are commonly called "out of rotation" or "overlap". Especially on serve reception you will see teams taking up such strange formations

that it's hard to believe they are in legal positions. Most college teams have only three of their players receive serves, and they stretch the positioning rules to the max in order to get the three receivers in position to be able to cover the whole court.

There are two basic rules about relative positioning. For both rules, player positions are determined by the positions of their feet on the floor. First, each front-row player must have at least a part of a foot closer to the net than both feet of the corresponding back-row player. Figure 1 shows an example of illegal front/back overlap.

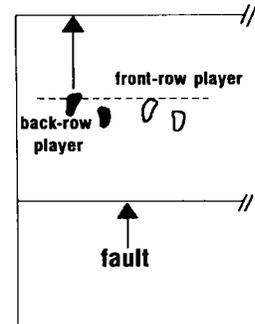


Figure 1

Second, each right (or left) side player must have at least part of a foot closer to the right (or left) sideline than both feet of the center player in the same row. The server is exempt from this rule. Figure 2 shows front-row players in correct position and back-row players illegally overlapping.

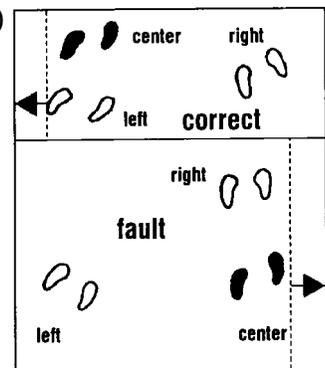


Figure 2

Notice that the rules apply only to players that are immediately adjacent to each other, not to players that are on a diagonal to each other. This is what gives teams the flexibility to get into the strange service reception formations mentioned above. It means that for purposes of overlap, the players on the right and left sides of the court only have to worry about two other players—the one next to them and the one in front or in back. The two players in the center have to avoid overlap with three others—the two on either side of them, plus the one in front or back of them.

The need to have serve receivers in the best locations often forces the setter to start far from where she needs to be to set the ball. If she is in the back row, she will try to anticipate the moment of serve and get

the quickest possible start moving up to the net. Most referees are pretty lenient on calling illegal overlap on a setter who starts in a legal position but moves past the front-row player slightly too soon.

The referee's signal for a player out of position is to make a horizontal circular motion with the hand or finger, as shown in Figure 3.



Figure 3

Once the ball has been served, the players may go anywhere on the court. There are some additional restrictions on blocking and attacking by back-row players, as well as crossing the center line, but those will be covered in another column.

Meeting Big Red—A Road Trip Journal

by Peter Morris, SideOut Club Board

There's nothing like watching MSU Volleyball play on the road to gain a deeper appreciation for all the work that goes into a successful program. There's an old saying that if you want to be sure to enjoy a meal, it's best not to inquire too closely into how it was made. But with Spartan Volleyball, I've been delighted to find that the closer you get, the better the program looks. You see a group of mature student-athletes who simultaneously handle the daunting pressures of top-level volleyball and academics. And you see the dedicated, caring support the players get from coaches, support staff and parents.

Some random notes from a long, hectic weekend in Lincoln:

You can't really appreciate the atmosphere at the Nebraska Coliseum until you've seen a match there! Tickets went on sale on August 1; I called first thing that morning and found that the best we could do was four separated seats. The operator was apologetic and I told her, "Don't apologize; it's a great thing for women's volleyball to have that kind of problem." On game days, the Nebraska Coliseum

becomes a sea of 4,000 red-and-white-clad fans who make so much noise after every Cornhusker point that some fans bring earplugs. There's a waiting list of up to five years for season tickets and, in these budget-conscious times, you might expect volleyball to have been moved to the neighboring 12,000-seat basketball stadium. However, the team realizes that the Coliseum's intimacy plays an integral role in their success. As former Huskers Head Coach Terry Pettit notes: "Winston Churchill said 'In the beginning, we build buildings. In the end, we are shaped by the buildings we live in.' I think the Coliseum shapes Nebraska volleyball." Pettit explains that the classic architecture of the building symbolizes the program's ability to build and maintain a tradition in these disposable times.

It's not all about architecture, of course; the noise in the Coliseum also intimidates the heck out of visiting clubs! Great players and coaches don't hurt either. The Cornhuskers have claimed 25 of the 27 Big Eight/Big 12 titles, have a seventy-match Big Twelve win streak, and boast an all-time conference home record of 196-2. The atmosphere in the Coliseum is so palpable that many visiting clubs are beaten before the match even begins. A gutsy Georgia Tech squad snapped Nebraska's 52-match regular-season home winning streak in the tournament championship match, but even Georgia Tech's players looked like deer in the headlights at times. It took Georgia Tech four championship points before it could finish off Nebraska; on one of those points, the serve didn't even reach the net.

While the atmosphere in the Coliseum is first and foremost intimidating, the fans are also respectful. Particularly impressive are the three rhythmic claps that follow the introduction of each visiting player. And Nikki Colson received a very warm reception in her return home. As tough as it is to be a visitor there, you can't help thinking how beneficial it is for women's volleyball to have a place like the Coliseum to test a program's mettle. The Spartans will certainly benefit on subsequent road trips from the opportunity to play in that environment.

Volleyball really is like an extended family. Tournament MVP and National Player of the Week Kele Eveland of Georgia Tech played both with and against Jenny Rood during their prep days. One of

the Santa Clara players had similarly played with and against Stephanie Knopp during high school. The two had kept in touch throughout their college careers and had looked forward to finally playing against each other as collegians at this tournament. Unfortunately, their reunion became a bittersweet one when the Santa Clara player broke her leg a week before the tournament.

The 1500-mile round trip from Lincoln to Lansing gave us renewed appreciation for the sacrifices that Mike and Nancy Colson and all the other parents give to support their daughters and the program!

Even after the tough matches and disappointing results on Friday and Saturday, the players kept smiles on their faces and positive attitudes. And they are so appreciative of their fans!

The coaches and support staff work so hard during the weekend -- to put it mildly, nobody is just "along for the ride." The schedule is so tight and there is no end of equipment that needs to be attached, assembled or moved.

I gained renewed respect for just how tough the matches can be on parents, especially when the team is struggling. There can't be a much more agonizing experience than watching a child perform and being unable to help or console them when something goes wrong. Moreover, our parents are worrying not just about the result of the match, but about their daughter's exam that week, her health, her emotional development, and all the miscellaneous and sundry challenges brought by college life. During the fifth game of the Santa Clara match, Jerry Rood exclaimed, "I'm a nervous wreck." We know how you feel, Jerry! I'm sure that every parent feels the same way during a match, with a couple of exceptions. Those exceptions are the Bellwoods, who now have two daughters on the team. I don't even want to imagine what they must go through!

While it's nice to have some home matches coming up, a road trip really deepens the appreciation one has of how much goes into a successful program. Every diehard volleyball fan should try to fit at least

one in this year.

SOC Fund Raiser—Check This Out!

Do you have your wristband? The SideOut Club is selling wristbands on behalf of Meridian Mall for their "Night of Giving" at \$5. One hundred percent (100%) of the proceeds go to benefit the SideOut Club.

The "Night of Giving" is a special evening of private shopping on Sunday, November 16, 2003 from 6:00-9:00 PM specifically for supporters of local charities and non-profit organizations. We have approval from the MSU Compliance Office to sell the wristbands as a fund raiser. Get the specifics on this special event at the SOC membership table or from one of the persons selling these. Consider buying a wristband to support the MSU Volleyball Program.

Side Out Club Board Members and Officers Elected

The annual meeting of the SideOut Club was held on August 23 after the Green and White Match. The most important business was the election of Board Members for three year terms. Those elected are: Jim Ellis, Susan Epple and Peter Morris. At the subsequent Board meeting all of last year's officers were re-elected to their posts.

You will see one of Peter's first contributions in this newsletter. Susan has agreed to be in charge of the 50/50 Raffle this season. Jim Ellis continues to serve the Club as Treasurer and Volunteer Coordinator.

★★Answer to Trivia Question★★

According to *www.richkern.com*, Lisa Argabright of Illinois, a member of the pre-season all-conference team, is the other Big Ten player who is listed at a height of 6-5.

2003 Schedule and Results

(All home matches are played in Jenison Field House. All times listed are Eastern.)

8/29	W	Villanova	30-14, 30-27, 30-25	10/17	L	ILLINOIS	24-30, 25-30, 25-30
8/30	W	Tennessee	28-30, 26-30, 31-29, 30-28, 17-15	10/18	W	NORTHWESTERN	30-24, 32-30, 30-19
8/30	W	Maryland	30-21, 30-27, 30-15	10/24		@Iowa	8:00 pm
9/5	W	South Carolina	30-19, 24-30, 30-17, 30-28	10/25		@Minnesota	8:00 pm
9/6	W	North Carolina	30-17, 30-28, 30-21	10/31		INDIANA	7:00 pm
9/12	L	Georgia Tech	20-30, 16-30, 25-30	11/1		PURDUE	8:00 pm
9/13	L	Nebraska	20-30, 20-30, 24-30	11/5		@Michigan	7:00 pm
9/14	W	Santa Clara	30-26, 26-30, 26-30, 30-21, 15-11	11/8		@Wisconsin	8:00 pm
9/20	W	San Diego	28-30, 30-21, 30-28, 30-28	11/14		@Ohio State	7:00 pm
9/20	W	American	30-19, 30-22, 34-36, 30-26	11/15		@Penn State	7:00 pm
9/26	L	PENN STATE	20-30, 30-28, 28-30, 30-26, 14-16	11/21		MINNESOTA	8:00 pm
9/27	W	OHIO STATE	30-25, 30-24, 31-33, 30-22	11/22		IOWA	8:00 pm
10/1	L	MICHIGAN	20-30, 23-30, 27-30	11/28		@Northwestern	8:00 pm
10/3	W	WISCONSIN	30-16, 24-30, 30-28, 30-22	11/29		@Illinois	8:00 pm
10/10	L	@Purdue	31-33, 29-31, 22-30	12/5-12/8		NCAA 1 st & 2 nd round	
10/11	W	@Indiana	26-30, 30-25, 30-26, 30-25	12/12-13		NCAA Regionals	
				12/18-20		NCAA Championships in Dallas, TX	



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