
The Service Line

Volleyball News from the MSU SideOut Club
Vol. VII No. 2
October 2001

Spartans Start Strongly, Then Falter

Fall 2001 started out well, as a combination of veterans and first-year starters produced a season start of 7-0, the best for Spartan volleyball since 1989. Unfortunately, the opening weekend of the Big Ten found them not quite up to the competition.

The graduation of starters Sarah Gustin, Christie Landry, and Jessica Sanborn left some big holes, but Nikki Colson, Michelle Kopka, and Kyla Smith are intent on filling them.

In spite of the disappointing Big Ten losses, Chuck Erbe emphasizes that this is a great team for spectators to watch. "They're an exciting team, a fun team, and they're going to play hard every second", he predicts. "There may still be some times when other teams run points on us, but you're never going to see us give up. We've got some great personalities, and we have a fabulous floor leader in Nikki Colson. We hope fans will be delighted when they see this year's Spartans."

Of course, returnee Erin Hartley got off to a fabulous start. Her performance during the Coca-Cola Spartan Invitational was awesome, hitting .536 for the tournament, while leading all players in kills, digs and blocks. Chuck Erbe was raving about the way Erin finished last season, but he's even more impressed with how she's started this year. "Erin Hartley is having the best season start of her career" he said after Saturday's match, as Erin was named the MVP of the tournament. As of September 24, she was the only Big Ten player to simultaneously have spots on the

conference top ten lists for kills, hitting percentage and blocks.

One of the biggest improvements has been her serving. She's been jump serving almost full time, and her aces per game have more than doubled compared with last year. At the same time, her aces-to-errors ratio has also improved from .45 to 1.1. Erin did some jump serving the last couple of seasons, but she didn't continue it throughout the season. Even this year, towards the end of some games the coaches have switched her to float serving, perhaps to save her energy, or to avoid errors at crucial times.

The Spartans have seen significant serving contributions from two other players, both of them back row specialists. The most spectacular has been Emily Engler, whose jump serving has wowed the fans. This was a total surprise to almost all of us, to see a player who made brief appearances in only 10% of MSU's games last season hit the court this season with

CONTENTS

Spartans Start Strongly, Then Falter	1
Big Ten Preview	3
Team Notes	3
SideOut Club Coach's Luncheons	4
Spartan Volleyball on the Air	4
Rally Scoring (Part 2 of 2)	5
Volleyball Tailgate Party	7
Home Attendance Rebounds	7
2001 Schedule and Results	8



Erin Hartley blasts a kill past a single Idaho blocker

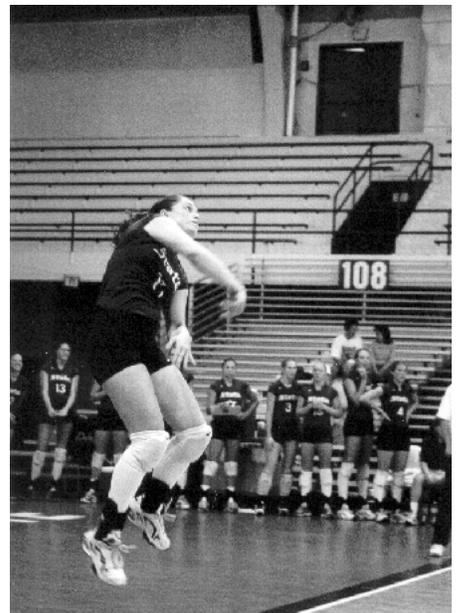
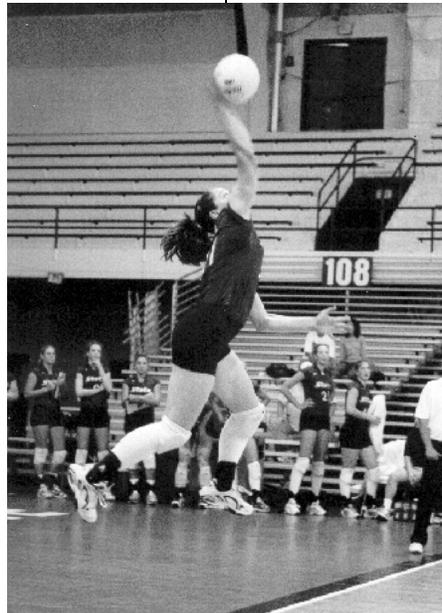
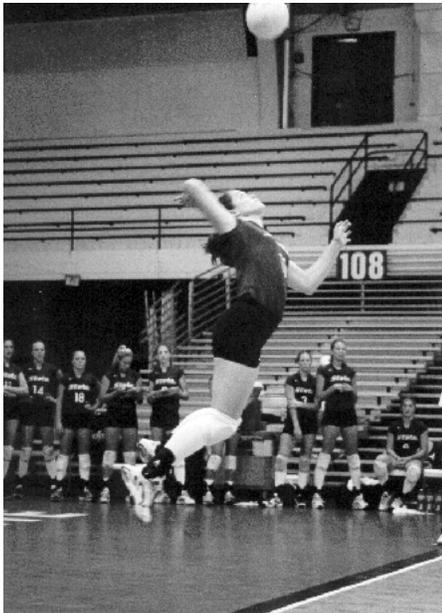
Photo: Chris Wolf

a fully developed killer jump serve. As of September 24, she was the service ace leader for the Big Ten with 1.0 aces per game. To put this into perspective, last year the Spartans as a entire team averaged only 1.33 aces per game!

Emily averaged one ace for every service error, which is an outstanding ratio. In addition, she had a huge number of serves that were not aces, but which our opponents passed badly enough that either the ball went back over the net or they simply couldn't develop a good offensive attack. This is something that doesn't show up in the official statistics, but which produces a significant number of points for us.

Most fans probably don't realize it, but our other top ace server is Stephanie Knopp She is third on the team in total aces, is tied for second in aces per game, and her aces-to-errors ratio is an amazing 1.5. Stephanie doesn't think she's doing anything special. "My serve, I really don't think, is that tough at all," Knopp said. "It's a pretty normal float serve. The coaches tell me where to serve and I serve it there."

Obviously her serve is tougher than the typical float serve. One other difference is that she isn't making many errors. Unfortunately, aside from Erin, Emily and Stephanie, MSU's serving is pretty bad. The three of them racked up 61 aces with only 56 errors through the first nine matches. Meanwhile, the rest of the team



Emily Engel gives a lesson in jump serving Photos: Chris Wolf

The Service Line

©2001 by the MSU SideOut Club, the official support group of Michigan State University women's volleyball.
Published five times per year, in March, August, October, November and December

- Newsletter Editor: Chris Wolf (517) 332-4353
- President: Jenny Bond (517) 676-2676
- Vice-president: Julie Carmichael (517) 676-5211
- Secretary: Ron Springer (517) 351-3008
- Treasurer: Jim Ellis (517) 323-3566

MSU SideOut Club, P.O. Box 80491, Lansing MI 48908
Email: jimandeileenellis@prodigy.net
Web site: www.msusideout.org

contributed only 25 aces, while committing 71 errors.

Kyla Smith has also stepped up to prove that she fully deserves the starting position as outside hitter. She improved greatly over the off-season. It's easy to see she's hitting the ball harder, more consistently, and smarter than last year. What may not be so apparent is her defensive abilities—as of September 24 she was fourth in the Big Ten in digs per game.

Chuck has so many freshmen this year that he plans to red-shirt three players—setter Mickey Davis and middles Megan Wallin and Brooke Langston—to give them more time to develop their skills. Fortunately, NCAA rules don't require non-injury red-shirt

declarations until the season is over. As long as a player has not entered a game during the season, she can be declared a red-shirt after the end of the season. This means that Chuck can decide at any time to put one of these players in the game if an injury to a starter or some other situation makes it necessary.

The red-shirt situation will put quite a bit of pressure on Nikki Colson at setter and Jenny Rood and Angela Morley in the middle, because the roster shows no substantial backup for them. Michelle Kopka could potentially move to the middle if needed, but Nikki will be expected to play every minute of every match. It's very unusual for a player to do this for an entire season, but Nikki seems to be one who will give her all to do it.

You may have noticed that this year's team looks more physically fit. The coaches say that they have been more dedicated about weight training and just generally staying in shape. It's not uncommon for athletes to gain weight in the off season, coming into fall practice out of condition. This year Chuck says he saw players return in better shape than they were at the end of last season.

Big Ten Preview

The first four Big Ten home matches for the Spartans will include three of the top teams in the conference.

Minnesota

Minnesota coach Mike Hebert may be doing a lot of experimenting this season. His only two solid returning starters are setter Lindsey Berg and middle blocker Stephanie Hagen. Kathy Tilson, yet another Texas Longhorn transferring to the Big Ten, is a likely starter at outside hitter, but the rest is up for grabs.

Early in the season their hitters have been performing very well, with three players holding top-ten hitting percentages in the conference. The Gophers also top the conference in service aces. Their defense, both blocking and digging, is a definite weakness however.

Penn State

2000 was a terrible year for Penn State. They finished an abysmal third in the Big Ten, matching their worst finish since they joined the conference in 1991. To make matters worse, they got knocked off in the regional final of the NCAA tournament, so they didn't even make it to the final four after three consecutive appearances. The insult of finishing in the Elite Eight

was compounded by the fact that one of their starting players, a defensive specialist, was lost to graduation, so they had only six returning starters for 2001. Obviously the Big Ten coaches were feeling sorry for Russ Rose when they picked the Nittany Lions to find themselves back at the top of the conference this year!

However, getting back to reality, the team has been plagued with problems this year. Rose first announced that Shannon Bortner would be the starting setter, but then subbed Jess Hayden in as setter for significant parts of every match. They lost a second veteran back-row specialist when Solena Quick decided not to return. Middle blocker Robyn Guokas was sidelined with an undisclosed illness. Mishka Levy disappeared from the starting lineup after the Stanford match, and who should step in as outside hitter but Shannon Bortner, the starting setter from two weeks earlier!

Ohio State

The Buckeyes have an unusually sparse roster this year, with only 11 players available to Coach Jim Stone. It's not clear what happened in their recruiting, but it appears that they only got one new player, Stacey Gordon, through regular recruiting.

However, Gordon jumped right into the starting lineup, and became the first freshman player in three years to be named Big Ten Player of the Week. She has been a major hitting force for the Buckeyes and is second in the Big Ten in digs.

They also lead all teams by placing three players on the pre-season all-conference squad. Ohio State got off to a 10-0 record, winning 30 games while losing only 1, but they have played no nationally-ranked teams yet.

Team Notes

Most college volleyball matches nationwide were **cancelled** between September 11 and 16, including MSU's scheduled competition at South Carolina. The Spartans played a scrimmage on Friday, and then took Saturday off to spend time with family and friends.

It's not ideal, but Chuck says that the trailers being used as **temporary locker rooms** are an adequate substitute. The Spartans and their visitors each have their own trailer behind Jenison Field House. The trailers actually feature office space and a meeting room in addition to the players' dressing area. They are air conditioned, and (fortunately) will soon have

heat as well.

You could call it a “**side effect**” of the new locker-room location—the Spartans will start every match this season on the opposite end of the court from what we’re used to. Chuck explains that the switch was intended to prevent the two teams from having to cross paths when they run to the locker rooms after game two. MSU will play game two on the northeast end, and will be able to go directly to their trailer through the northwest exit.

If you pay attention to detail, you may have noticed what seemed to be an error in the roster in the last issue. **Mickey Davis** was listed as number 9 and **Brooke Langston** as number 12, but when the Spartans hit the court for fall, we saw just the opposite. Well, it wasn’t an error, but a last-minute switch. When the new jerseys came in, Mickey’s was too tight for her, while Brooke’s had room to spare. Since the jerseys already had numbers, but no names, the two players were able to trade uniforms.

SideOut Club Coach’s Luncheons

Be sure to make your Spartan volleyball experience complete by coming to the SideOut Club Coach’s Luncheons this year. Coach Erbe is known for his frank and candid commentary about our team, the Big Ten competition, and volleyball in general.

The first luncheon is scheduled for our home opening weekend of the Big Ten season, Saturday September 29, when we host Iowa. The second one coincides with the Ohio State match on October 20, and the third is four days later on Wednesday, October 24, when Michigan comes to town.

This year the Club will also experiment with some Friday luncheons, to try to help those fans who are busier on Saturday. If Friday is a better day for you, be sure to make it to the Friday luncheons on November 9 and November 23.

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 \$7.50 to cover food and drink.

Spartan Volleyball on the Air

Local Radio and TV

AT&T Cable in Lansing and East Lansing/Meridian Township will televise seven of ten Big Ten home matches this year, excluding Purdue, Northwestern and Wisconsin.

WVFN AM 730 will produce live radio broadcasts of five Spartan home matches and two away matches. John Kreger will do the play-by-play announcing. The schedule is as follows:

Date	Opponent	Time
9/28	MINNESOTA	7:00
10/3	@Michigan	7:00
10/13	@Illinois	8:00
10/19	PENN STATE	7:00
10/24	MICHIGAN	7:00
11/10	WISCONSIN	8:00
11/24	INDIANA	8:00

There is a possibility that one more regular-season broadcast will be added. All NCAA tournament matches for MSU will be carried on WVFN.

ESPN2

Three Big Ten matches—one involving MSU—will be televised on a delayed basis by ESPN2. All three matches involve what are expected to be the top five teams in the conference. The first will be Wisconsin at Minnesota on October 19, which will be aired on October 21 at 3:30 pm. The following week, October 28 at 4 pm, will bring us the Wisconsin at Penn State match played October 27.

The Spartans will make their national television appearance on November 18 at 2 pm, (match played at Ohio State on November 16).

Fox Sports Chicago

Eight Big Ten matches, including MSU at Penn State, will be carried on Fox Sports Chicago. The MSU/Penn State match, to be played November 17, will, coincidentally, be shown November 18 at 4 pm, the same day as the ESPN broadcast involving MSU.

Rally Scoring (Part 2 of 2)

By now you have probably seen some women's college matches played with rally scoring. In part one of this article we explained how rally scoring was first adopted for men's matches at the international level, where the side out rate is extraordinarily high, and then trickled down to other types of volleyball. We also showed why it is not the magic solution to getting volleyball on television. Part two focuses primarily on what rally scoring means to spectators.

Rally scoring is more exciting for the fans.

The theory is that sports fans nowadays need constant stimulation, and get bored with traditional volleyball due to its extended periods with no scoring. Rally scoring solves this by guaranteeing that two or three points will be scored every minute.

If this is true, how can we explain the popularity of soccer, hockey, and baseball, where teams play for a couple of hours, only to win the game by a score of 3-1? What about football, where the teams can move the ball back and forth on the field for fifteen minutes (or more) without scoring a point? The excitement in sports comes from the quality of play, not from making it easy to score points.

Rally scoring results in games with closer scores.

Some proponents claim that rally-scoring games are more exciting because the scores are closer.

This is wishful thinking. If you take the same sequence of plays and score it under both side-out scoring and rally scoring, the point differential separating the teams is identical, with one minor exception. (The exception is that if the team that received first is now serving, their point differential will be one point better in rally scoring than in side-out scoring.)

If rally scoring changes the length of a game, making it longer or shorter, the point differential could change, but it is just as likely to be larger as to be smaller. Already this year Penn State won one game by a score of 30-8. Of the games played nationwide the first two weeks of this season, over 7% of games 1 through 4 were won by a margin of 16 points or more, with the worst one being 30-4. Meanwhile, the percentage of two-point games was unchanged from

last year, at just over 16%.

Rally scoring makes the players play harder.

With rally scoring there is no luxury of a slow start. A team can't afford to fall too far behind early, and then slowly start siding out and coming back, because the score just keeps rolling upward and the game will be over too soon. This forces the quality of play to be better, with all the players playing their best game all the time.

College teams aren't slow starters because of side out scoring. They are slow starters because they are young, inexperienced, emotional, non-professional players who have many other things going on in their lives. Chuck Erbe has said many times that he doesn't know why teams sometimes go flat at crucial times. This isn't going to change just because of rally scoring. The quality of play isn't going to go up; the fans will just be deprived of the chance to see the slow-starting team make an exciting comeback and win the game.

And if you think side out scoring rewards players who loaf, you must acknowledge that rally scoring has its own built-in disincentive to play hard. If one team gets a lead of a few points, and they know they can side out consistently, it no longer matters how well they play on their own serve. If they lose a rally on their serve, they can just shrug their shoulders and side out time after time to win the game.

Rally scoring is easier to understand.

Some say that traditional volleyball scoring is hard for newcomers to understand. Spectators are confused when, for example, a spectacular kill by a team in one circumstance earns them a point, whereas the identical play in another circumstance does not earn a point. To increase the popularity of the sport, we should eliminate any such obstacles that might inhibit a new fan's acceptance of volleyball.

Almost everyone is exposed to volleyball at an early age, and is well aware that a team must be serving in order to score a point. Other sports such as badminton and racquetball also use side-out scoring. There's even anecdotal evidence that it's the changes in volleyball scoring that are more confusing to people. During the 2000 Olympics, where volleyball used rally scoring for the first time, I was discussing the games with a colleague at work. He wanted to

know what was going on with the scoring, because he thought he knew how volleyball worked but couldn't follow the scoring. Two other volleyball fans have told me of hearing exactly the same reaction.

There are also examples in other sports where identical plays can have different results. Suppose a football team makes a play that advances the ball nine yards to within a yard of the first-down marker—what happens next? If it was first down, they keep the ball and try again. If it was fourth down, the opponents get the ball. Same play, very different result. There are other examples where fans are already used to “context” in athletics.

Fans want the predictability of rally scoring.

Some say that not only do television executives want predictable match lengths, but so do fans. They want to know that they can take the kids to a 7:00 match knowing they will be home by 9:30. Similarly, they don't want to tell the baby sitter, “We'll be home in an hour and a half, or possibly three hours, depending on the match.”

First of all, as discussed above, the three-out-of-five format is responsible for most match variability. Rally scoring will have minimal effect on this.

In addition, when it does affect match length, rally scoring will lengthen the short matches, and shorten the long ones. Usually the short matches are 3-0 blowouts between mismatched teams. Do fans really want to have lop-sided matches last longer? Why do fans leave Spartan Stadium in droves when the score is 24-0 in the fourth quarter? Because seeing one team beat up on another one is boring.

Many of the longer volleyball matches are the most exciting ones the sport has to offer. Why do we want to cut those short? The matches where one team loses the first two games and then battles back to win the match are the ones that everyone talks about later. This is what creates excitement for the sport.

Rally scoring will invalidate past statistics.

The change in scoring will make statistical comparisons with past years impossible, and mean that most record categories will have to have asterisks. Records such as kills per game, kills per match, and even kills per career will no longer be comparable with past years. Already Volleyball Magazine, in an article about the 2001 men's season,

referred to Dave McKenzie of Long Beach State as “the record holder in kills under rally scoring”.

If in a few years volleyball continues with the other changes, such as the clock, that are necessary to make it truly compatible with television, there will be yet another set of records.

Those who favor rally scoring say this is a minor issue that shouldn't affect the discussion, that it won't really matter in twenty years, and that our sport can deal with it just as other sports have.

Rally scoring removes a unique and valuable aspect of volleyball.

Many fans cherish come-from-behind victories as an important part of volleyball. Unlike timed sports, it's never too late for a come-back in side-out scoring. If a team that is behind can side out consistently while scoring a few points here and there, they have all the time they need to turn things around and win the game. Many of the legendary matches are those that were won in amazing comebacks. Under rally scoring, this will no longer happen.

Rally scoring advocates counter that those come-from-way-behind matches are so rare that the impact will be negligible. In addition, why would we want a format that rewards a team that starts a game by falling way behind? And there will always be legendary matches, regardless of what scoring system is used.

Rally scoring favors the receiving team.

Rally scoring is inherently flawed, in that it gives a statistical advantage to the receiving team.

In traditional volleyball, a team must serve in order to score a point. Let's call this a “service point”. In rally scoring a point is scored on every serve, so if the non-serving team earns a side out, they also get a point. Let's call this a “side-out point”.

Recall from our earlier discussion that top women's college teams side out about 58% of the time. This means that in rally scoring it is easier to score a side-out point than to score a service point. Fans often refer to service points as “real” points, and consider side-out points to be cheap points.

So how does this give one team an advantage?

In side-out scoring, all points are scored on serve, so

they are all the more difficult “real” points. The team that wins a game will have scored at least two “real” points more than their opponents.

In rally scoring, this is not the case. To illustrate, suppose on the first serve of the game, the receiving team sides out and wins the point. This is a “cheap” side-out point, but it puts them one point ahead. Next, suppose they win a “real” service point, putting them ahead 2-0. Now all they have to do for the rest of the game is to match their opponent, side-out point for side-out point and service point for service point, and they will win the game. In so doing, they will have scored one service point and one side-out point more than their opponents. (If you think about it a little, you’ll see that this holds true regardless of when in the game they score these points; it’s not necessary for them to score them on the first two serves, as in our simplified example.)

In contrast, the only way that the first-serving team in rally scoring can gain a two-point lead is by scoring two more service points than their opponents. So rally scoring sets a higher requirement for the team that serves first than for the team that receives first.

Simulations performed by Rob Peglar, a volleyball player, coach, and Division I official, show that the advantage is significant. With two equally matched top-level NCAA teams, side-out scoring produces a 50% chance of either team winning. Rally scoring tips this to an advantage of approximately 52 to 54% for the receiving team.

What do you think?

The debate over rally scoring has raged for three years now, and shows little sign of abating. Some say revised scoring is necessary in order to get on television and broaden the volleyball audience. Some even claim it improves the game for spectators. The opponents say it is ruining a wonderful sport. This season is your chance to decide for yourself.

Volleyball Tailgate Party

Come on out to join fellow MSU fans who are planning the second annual Spartan Volleyball Tailgate Party on October 20. MSU hosts Ohio State that night, for what should be one of the best matches of the season.

Join us on the west parking lot side of Jenison (the “back” side where the new entrance is) starting at 4 pm, until game time at 8. Grill, eat and drink with other volleyball fans. This is not an official SideOut Club event, but we hope to have an information flyer available at the SideOut Club table.

Home Attendance Rebounds

MSU’s attendance for 2000 reversed the downward trend it had been on since 1996. The 15% increase over 1999 brought average attendance to 1,052 per match, good for 22nd place in the nation and sixth in the Big Ten.

The Big Ten led all conferences in attendance, boasting three of the top five and six of the top 25 venues.

In individual matches, Hawai’i entertained 18 of the top 21 crowds, although Colorado’s visit to Nebraska took the number one spot with 12,504 fans. The largest Big Ten match drew 5,392 to watch Minnesota at the Wisconsin field house.

	Team	Dates	Total	Avg.
1	Hawai’i	20	134,695	6,735
2	Nebraska	17	72,178	4,246
3	Wisconsin	15	44,117	2,941
4	Minnesota	16	40,865	2,554
5	Penn State	17	41,827	2,460
6	Illinois State	11	25,154	2,287
7	Long Beach St.	15	30,172	2,011
8	Colorado State	19	38,027	2,001
9	Pacific	19	35,081	1,846
10	Stanford	9	14,940	1,660
15	Illinois	13	18,263	1,405
20	Purdue	11	12,550	1,141
22	Michigan State	13	13,677	1,052

2001 Schedule and Results

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

8/31	W	Auburn	30-19, 21-30, 30-25, 30-22	10/12	@Indiana	7:00 pm
	W	Dayton	33-31, 27-30, 30-25, 30-23	10/13	@Illinois	8:00 pm
9/1	W	Denver	30-23, 28-30, 30-19, 30-19	10/19	PENN STATE	7:00 pm
	W	Western Michigan	29-31, 30-28, 30-19, 30-20	10/20	OHIO STATE	8:00 pm
9/7	W	Winthrop	30-23, 27-30, 30-21, 30-22	10/24	MICHIGAN	7:00 pm
	W	Idaho	30-17, 30-28, 30-14	10/26	PURDUE	7:00 pm
9/8	W	Bowling Green	30-25, 30-26, 30-24	10/30	@Florida	7:00 pm
9/14	—	Wake Forest	cancelled	11/2	@Iowa	8:00 pm
	—	South Carolina	cancelled	11/3	@Minnesota	8:00 pm
9/15	—	Jacksonville State	cancelled	11/9	NORTHWESTERN	8:00 pm
9/21	L	Wisconsin	24-30, 18-30, 30-25, 20-30	11/10	WISCONSIN	8:00 pm
9/22	L	Northwestern	24-30, 30-32, 20-30	11/16	@Ohio State	7:00 pm
9/28		MINNESOTA	7:00 pm	11/17	@Penn State	7:00 pm
9/29		IOWA	7:00 pm	11/23	ILLINOIS	8:00 pm
10/3		@Michigan	7:00 pm	11/24	INDIANA	8:00 pm
10/6		@Purdue	8:00 pm	11/29-12/2	NCAA 1 st & 2 nd round	
				12/6-9	NCAA Regional	
				12/13-15	NCAA Championships in San Diego, CA	



P.O. Box 80491
Lansing MI 48908