
The Service Line

Volleyball News from the MSU SideOut Club
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Hoping for a Strong Big Ten Finish

As the season began, optimists around the Spartan volleyball program talked about moving up a couple of spots from 2000's fifth-place finish in the Big Ten. Now, at the halfway point in the conference schedule, that hope has faded. Instead, the talk is about what's needed to simply assure an eighth consecutive invitation to the NCAA tournament.

One factor that should work in MSU's favor is that the second half will be played mostly in Jenison Field House (six out of ten matches) whereas the first half was mostly on the road. The team is 2-2 in home matches so far, versus 2-4 on the road.

However, this is the first year since 1994 that MSU's mid-season conference record has wound up below .500. In addition, the Spartans have historically shown no more than a one-victory improvement between the first and second halves of the season. If the first half's 4-6 is followed by a 5-5 second half, just as it was in 1994, the resulting 9-11 record might not be good enough to get into post-season play.

Rough Edges

It's clear now that, in spite of the pre-season hopes, 2001 is a build-for-the-future year, where the play on the court will inevitably show a lot of rough edges.

One important factor, of course, is that we have only two players starting in established positions from last year—Erin Hartley at opposite and Angela Morley in the middle.

Sophomore Nikki Colson is a bright spot, showing strong play as a first-year setter with good defensive skills at both digging and blocking. Looking at the other "newcomers", we have two freshmen—Kim Schram and Michelle Kopka—at the outside hitter position, and an adapted outside hitter—sophomore Jenny Rood—in the middle.

Jenny actually played the middle position for a couple of years in high school before switching to the left side. Of course there's a big difference between playing it in high school and playing it in the Big Ten. Chuck Erbe emphasizes that the M1 (the middle blocker who plays next to the setter) has the most complicated hitting and blocking role on the team. Jenny is obviously still learning how to play



Kim Schram takes a swing from off the net Photo: Chris Wolf

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this demanding position. Kim and Michelle show lots of promise on the left side, exemplified by Kim's 20 kills with a .441 percentage against Ohio State, but they can still be erratic.

The Spartans also miss the stability of senior Lisa Ashton on the court. Lisa was diagnosed with herniated disks in her spine, a condition that causes her pain most of the time even though she is no longer playing. The condition is probably genetic, and it has also affected her brother.

The pre-conference season didn't help our team much this season either. The seven matches we played were against some of the weakest non-conference competition we have faced in quite a few years. It was nice to have seven victories, but they were not very good preparation for the Big Ten. The trip to South Carolina would have been a valuable road experience, as well as a chance to tangle with a ranked opponent, but circumstances prevented that from happening.

If you saw the Minnesota, Iowa or Ohio State matches, you know that this year's team is capable of dominating play, at certain times. Unfortunately, they haven't put it together consistently enough to win many matches. Too often they pull off a brilliant play and then follow it up with an error.

Many of the errors have been bad serves and shanked passes. In nine out of the first ten conference matches, MSU gave up more points on

service errors and reception errors than their opponents did. (The only exception came against Purdue.) However, this is hardly the whole story, because one of the worst serving/passing performances was the victory over Iowa, where we gave up 28 points on these types of errors, while Iowa only surrendered 15 in return. Conversely, one of our best serving/passing results was against Ohio State, but we lost the match anyway.

Blocking has been a similar story of ups and downs. In the three-game match against Minnesota the Spartans stuff-blocked a total of 13 Gopher attacks, while in Illinois they could only stop 3.

Looking at the Big Ten statistics shows that blocking is actually the Spartans' strong suit. The team ranks third in the conference, and Angela Morley is third individually with an average of 1.35 blocks per game. In other categories, MSU ranks between fifth and eighth place. Only two other Spartan individuals show up among the top ten in any of the six categories that are reported.

It appears that we simply can't yet execute at a high level, play after play, as a championship team can. But, that's often a characteristic of a rebuilding year, and young players can make dramatic improvements from week to week. Let's all keep cheering while watching things start to come together!

President's Corner

by SideOut Club President Jenny Bond

Greetings to all SideOut Club members. It has been good to see your support of the team as we have come through some difficult matches. I am encouraged that we have a young team composed of special young women who are attempting to do their best on the court and in the classroom. Sometimes when I hear people complaining about their performance, I want to ask the individuals if they always shoot par or less when playing golf or if their decisions are always correct. These examples help me to put things into perspective. The SideOut Club is the booster club for our team—especially when they need us most. I am especially sensitive to how difficult it must be now for Lisa Ashton who is suffering from back pain in addition to the pain of

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*Nikki Colson and Jenny Rood wait for the opponent's serve.
Photo: Chris Wolf*

not playing. Keep her in your thoughts and prayers.

Email Announcements

Notices of the recent Coach's Luncheons were sent to all club members whose email addresses we have. If you have email and did not receive the message, please email me with your address. Send to jbond@msu.edu.

Bus Trip

Check the SideOut Club table at the next match to get information on the bus trip planned for Ohio State. Julie Carmichael will have details. It should be great fun! We will leave about noon on Friday, November 16 and return on the same day after the game. The bus will be comfortable with a bathroom on board. The fellowship will be great. Do not hesitate to join us, even if you have not taken advantage of a SOC activity in the past. You will not

remain a stranger very long. Remember—we all love volleyball and the Spartans!! This makes a marriage made in heaven.

Tailgate Party

Thanks to John Ulrich, Cathy Caswell, and others responsible for arranging the tailgate prior to the home game with Ohio State. Turnout was good—many fans enjoying excellent food and fellowship. I realize that I would never have met some of these very interesting people if it were not for the SideOut Club. We look forward to next year's event.

Volleyball Banquet

The banquet will be at Hawk Hollow on Sunday, November 25 at 1 PM. The SideOut Club will be in charge of the event this year. More details will follow, but put the date on your calendars now. I always find this a special event—the team looks so different in gowns, the parents are excited and the team and coaches deserve our support.

Club Merchandise

It is not too early to think about buying holiday gifts, and what could be finer than SOC merchandise. Ask for your 10% discount as a SOC member. Also, pick up media guides if you have not already done so.

Thanks again for your support. Sign up to help with raffle tickets or selling merchandise, consider joining us for the bus trip and make plans for the banquet. The SideOut Club is another of those groups that the more you contribute and participate, the more rewards you receive.

Do not hesitate to contact me at a game or via email if you have suggestions for the Club, concerns, comments or whatever. Your SOC Board wants to hear from you.

See you courtside. Go State!

The Match That Wasn't

Unless you examined the schedule carefully this year, you might not have noticed a match in late October that seemed out of place. And if you look again now, you'll see it has been cancelled. What's the story behind this mystery match?

On October 29, the MSU volleyball team was supposed to make a trip to Florida to play an unusual mid-week match against a non-Big-Ten opponent. The contest in Gainesville would have pitted the Spartans against the Florida Gators, currently ranked number 9 in the nation.

In recent years, once October arrived, the Spartans' schedule has normally been made up exclusively of Big Ten teams. However, it wasn't always this way. During the 80's, every season saw mid- to late-season matches against opponents such as Notre Dame, Western Michigan, Bowling Green, Ball State, and many others.

When Penn State joined the Big Ten in 1991, the conference season was extended from nine weeks to ten, leaving less time to play other opponents. Since then MSU's non-conference matches have been pretty much limited to September.

It's always possible to fit some mid-week matches into the calendar, but Chuck Erbe hasn't seen much benefit in it. He tried it a couple of times, in 1997-98, when the athletic department was trying to promote "home" matches in Grand Rapids in order to reach alumni and other boosters in Western Michigan. In 1997 it was an exhibition match at Van Andel Arena against the U.S. national team featuring Val Sterk in her first year. In 1998 we played Western Michigan at the same location.

One relevant change since the 80's is that now the MSU volleyball program puts a very high priority on competing for the Big Ten title. Extra non-conference matches disrupt the training schedule, and leave less time to prepare for the critical meetings with Big Ten opponents, so Chuck has avoided them.

So, why now schedule a mid-season trip to Florida?

As reported here in March, the NCAA has a National TV Committee, chaired by Florida coach Mary Wise, which is trying to make a live NCAA volleyball game-of-the-week television broadcast a reality.

Chuck Erbe is the Big Ten representative on the committee, and has for many years been developing a timed match format to fit in a two-hour TV slot.

So, what could be more natural than an MSU/Florida match to serve as a demonstration of what the committee is considering?

The match was not scheduled to be on national TV, because NCAA arrangements have not progressed that far yet, but it would have been carried live by the Sunshine Sports Cable network in Florida.

But apparently there was a misunderstanding. The NCAA would not allow experimental scoring in a regular-season match, so the only way it could be played was as an exhibition. Mary Wise said that she planned it as a regular-season match, so she wanted to go ahead with it using regular scoring. Chuck, on the other hand, saw the demonstration of the timed format as the whole reason for the trip, so he was only willing to play it as an exhibition. Since the two coaches couldn't agree, the match was cancelled.

Bus Trip to Ohio State

Join the Spartan Volleyball Team on the road on Friday, November 16 to Columbus, Ohio!! A bus trip is planned to depart at 12 noon and return home following the match. Cost is \$35 plus match ticket. We will arrive in plenty of time to eat dinner and watch the warm-up. Join in on the fun and camaraderie by signing up via email to jccarmichael@yahoo.com, or call (517) 676-5211 or stop by the SideOut Club Merchandise Table at the home matches. GO GREEN!!!!

Statistics Primer— Blocks

When looking at the blocking figures for a match, it's important to realize that a block in a box score is somewhat different than the rule-book definition. In the rule book, blocking is defined as "action close to the net that deflects the ball coming from the opponent's team area". However, for statistical purposes, a block is awarded only if the play "leads directly to" a point for the blocker's team.

This means that a blocked ball that is kept in play does not earn the player a block in the box score. These "non-blocks" happen in one of two ways. Either the ball hits the blocker and continues on past where it is kept in play by the blocker's teammates,

or it is blocked back into the opponent's court, where the opponents keep it in play. Both of these types of touches are important to a team's defense, but they do not get credit as blocks.

The box score has two statistical categories for blocks—block solos (BS) and block assists (BA). A block solo is the more dramatic play, when only a single player jumps to block, and successfully blocks for a point. When more than one player participates in a successful block, each of them is awarded a block assist, even if only one player actually touches the ball. Since each player covered part of the net, they all earn partial credit for the block.

For statistical purposes a block can occur only when a ball is attacked by the opponents. If a player bumps the ball over the net just to keep it in play (which you will recall from last year's article is not considered an attack), and an opposing front-row player jumps up and intercepts it, stuffing it to the floor for a point, it is not credited as a block, even if it looked exactly like a block. Instead, it is credited as a kill for the player who stuffed it.

The third blocking column in a box score is for blocking errors (BE). A blocking error occurs whenever a player in the act of blocking commits a violation, such as touching the net, crossing the center line, or throwing the ball. A blocking error always results in a kill for the opposing player who attacked the ball.

The final blocking statistic in the box score is Total Team Blocks. This is a calculated statistic defined as the sum of a team's block solos plus one-half of the sum of its block assists. For example, a team that earned 3 BS's and 10 BA's in a match would have $3 + 10/2 = 8$ total team blocks.

If you look at box scores very much, you may have notice the peculiar fact that a team can have a fractional number of total blocks, such as 8.5. This is a result of the way block assists are credited. If all assisted blocks occur because of a double block, the total number of block assists for the team will be an even number, and when you divide that by two to get total team blocks, the result will be a whole number of blocks.

However, when a triple block occurs, three players

earn block assists. If you add those up and divide by two, you'll see that the team gets credited for 1.5 blocks for each triple block. You might guess that the statistics committee thought triple-blocks were really cool and wanted to reward a team that could pull one off, but this probably is not the case. It's more likely that they wanted to make things easy for the statistician. Otherwise the statistician would be required either to keep a separate tally of team blocks or to award block assists in various fractions depending on how many players participated.

Upcoming Events

Remember that the last two **coach's luncheons** of the season will both be held at 11:30 on Fridays, November 9 and 23 at Buddies in East Lansing.

November 10 against Wisconsin will be High School night. This is the match for which high school volleyball players are invited to come as a group with their teammates. The Spartan players will offer a post-match **autograph session** for the occasion.

November 24, the last match of the season, is planned to be a little different from usual this year, with Parents' night and Seniors' night combined into one. Lisa Ashton and Erin Hartley will be recognized for their accomplishments as Spartans.

MSU Men Host Tournament

The MSU Men's Volleyball Club will host their annual "Back to the Hardwood" tournament on Saturday and Sunday, November 16 and 17. This is the 12th year for the tournament, which will feature top men's college teams from throughout the region.

MSU men's volleyball operates as a club sport, rather than a varsity team, so most of the other teams participating will be club teams as well. This will include most Big Ten schools, many other Michigan teams, as well as others from around the region.

The regular season for the men starts in January, and their schedule will be posted at their web site < <http://www.msu.edu/~msuvball/vball.htm> >. Every SideOut Club member should attend at least one men's match, to see the difference in playing styles from the women.

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	W	Indiana	30-16, 26-30, 30-28, 30-20
	W	Dayton	33-31, 27-30, 30-25, 30-23	10/13	L	Illinois	27-30, 26-30, 22-30
9/1	W	Denver	30-23, 28-30, 30-19, 30-19	10/19	L	PENN STATE	23-30, 24-30, 25-30
	W	Western Michigan	29-31, 30-28, 30-19, 30-20	10/20	L	OHIO STATE	24-30, 30-24, 18-30, 26-30
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	10/29	—	@Florida	cancelled
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	W	MINNESOTA	30-17, 30-25, 30-27	11/17		@Penn State	7:00 pm
9/29	W	IOWA	30-18, 30-16, 26-30, 30-28	11/23		ILLINOIS	8:00 pm
10/3	L	Michigan	30-19, 30-28, 26-30, 23-30, 9-15	11/24		INDIANA	8:00 pm
10/6	W	Purdue	29-31, 30-25, 31-29, 30-25	11/29-12/2		NCAA 1 st & 2 nd round	
				12/6-9		NCAA Regional	
				12/13-15		NCAA Championships in San Diego, CA	

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