
The Service Line

Volleyball News from the MSU SideOut Club
Vol. VII No. 5
March 2002

Two, Two, ... Two Teams in One

Spartan volleyball fans attending a tournament this spring may think they're seeing double when they find not one, but two, MSU teams competing. Unfortunately there won't be a tournament in Jenison Field House, so the closest spot to enjoy this unusual experience will be Ann Arbor.

An NCAA rule change combined with Chuck Erbe's willingness to experiment will provide the opportunity to see two separate teams, and thus some unique Spartan lineups. The rule change allows red-shirt players to compete in off-season matches against other schools. Chuck feels that this change has been long overdue. "It never made sense to restrict competition for red-shirt players in the non-traditional season. The players are already training with the team, and spring tournaments are just another form of practice."

With Mickey Davis, Brooke Langston, and Megan Wallin eligible to play, MSU has a roster of 14 players for the spring. This gave Chuck the idea of having two separate teams of seven play in each of the spring tournaments. All of the host schools agreed to this unorthodox arrangement, even to the extent of allowing MSU to switch players between teams during the day.

The team started spring practice in late February, but will see its first actual competition March 16 at the University of Michigan. (For those who want to go,

the tourney will run all day at Cliff Keen Arena, at the corner of Hoover and State Streets. Hope to see you there!) The following weekend will see a trip to Arizona. On April 6, the Spartans will play at Kent State, and they will finish the non-traditional season April 13 at South Carolina.

The Arizona tournament is notable as one of the strongest spring tournaments MSU has ever participated in. In addition to host Arizona, who finished 2001 ranked #4 in the country, it features #7 Wisconsin, and #22 Brigham Young.

Chuck plans to divide the teams in different ways for each tournament. For the competition at Arizona and South Carolina, he expects to assemble an A team representing the current strongest lineup and a B team of the others. At Ann Arbor and Kent State he expects to mix the players up a bit more, testing out different combinations.

Team Notes

Erin Hartley left for Colorado Springs on February 28 to spend ten days training with the U.S. National Team. According to Chuck, they are impressed with her size and strength and will be looking especially at her potential as a setter! To get prepared, Erin has been training with the Spartans this spring, working on her setting. She says she really enjoys it, but gets frustrated sometimes because there's so much to learn about running an offense.

Christy Landry, Maren Witzel, and Vicki Basil have all been coaching high school teams this winter.

Jenna Wrobel has set her sights on the beach. She has moved to California and is training to play on the pro beach tour this year.

Getting back to the current Spartan team, Chuck says that **practice** is going very well. "We have an experienced core returning for fall including solid

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At Wisconsin for the NCAA second round, a quick Spartan play catches the Badger block off-guard *Photo: Chris Wolf*

players in every class, giving us lots of depth”, he says. As a result, practices have been different this spring than any other previous year, with much more time devoted to playing. In fact, it’s basically divided 50/50 between the 6-on-6 team play on Monday, Thursday and Saturday, and the individual skills work on Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday. This makes the players happy since almost everyone enjoys playing more than they enjoy doing skill drills.

Since the team is returning all but one of its starters, there probably won’t be any big surprises on the court next fall. Of course, the big question is—who will replace Erin Hartley on the right side? Since we didn’t see another player in a backup role at that position last year, up until now we really haven’t had a clue. However, the word from Chuck is that **Michelle Kopka** is training in that position and will be the primary right-side player for the spring.

Chuck adds that **Emily Engel**’s serving has been almost automatic aces in practice. She’s working hard on conditioning, in order to keep a killer jump serve throughout the season, rather than starting out strong and then tailing off as happened in 2001.

NCAA Adopts Libero Rule

MSU volleyball fans can expect to see one or more of their favorite Spartans in a different color uniform

this fall, and it’s not because they are transferring to another school. The contrasting jersey will identify one player on the court as the “libero”, a specialized defensive position that has just been approved by the new NCAA volleyball rules committee after several years of use in international competition, pro leagues, and men’s college play.

“We believe the adoption of the libero will add a new element of excitement to the game and raise the level of play,” said Terry Pettit, former Nebraska volleyball coach and chair of the committee. “It has the potential to create opportunities for the smaller athlete.”

The basic idea of the libero (pronounced LEE-bah-ro) is that of a player who does nothing but pass the ball and play back-row defense. Unlike a regular defensive specialist, who can only play half the game, the libero can play almost the entire game

The libero is an optional position, so a coach who sees no advantage in it for his team does not have to use it. If a libero will be used, the lineup submitted by the coach must list six regular players in their starting order, plus a seventh player designated as the libero for that game. (In international play, the libero must stay the same for an entire match.)

There are two unique aspects of the libero position—the way she enters and leaves the game and the restrictions on her play.

The libero does not “substitute” for another player, but instead “replaces” that player. At any time between rallies, the libero can enter the game, replacing any non-serving back-row player. The replacement does not have to be signaled by the coach, acknowledged by the referee, or recorded by the scorekeeper; the two players just swap places.

The libero comes out of the game the same way, but must always be replaced by the same player that she last replaced. (If the coach wants a different regular player in that spot, the original player must first replace the libero, and then the coach must call for a normal substitution.) There is no limit on the number of times a libero may enter the game, and none of these replacements count against the team substitution limit.

In exchange for this flexibility, the playing restrictions on the libero are very strict. The libero cannot:

- play in the front row (and thus cannot be a blocker)
- serve the ball,
- attack the ball while it is above the height of the net (i.e. she cannot be used as a back-row attacker)
- set the ball to a teammate from in front of the attack line. (Technically, the rule says that a player may not attack a ball that is completely above the height of the net, if the libero set that ball to her from the attack zone using an overhand finger pass.)

At the same time they added the libero, the rules committee reduced the number of team substitutions from eighteen to twelve, the level it was prior to 1999. This means that a team that chooses not to use a libero will probably be at a disadvantage under the new rules.

The tradeoffs between the libero and the regular defensive specialist are complex. There are many possible ways to use the libero, but the classic method is as a back-row replacement for both of the middle blockers on a team, as follows:

Suppose that M1 serves first. As soon as a sideout occurs, so that M1 is no longer a server, the libero replaces M1 in the back row. The libero stays in the game for M1, playing all the positions across the back row until rotation would require her to enter the front row. At that point she is replaced by M1, and M2 rotates to the back row and serves. When the next sideout occurs, the libero replaces M2 in the

back row. This cycle repeats throughout the game.

In this scenario, the libero plays for 5/6 of the game. For the other 1/6 of the game, one of the middle blockers is in the back row serving and playing defense.

When a team uses regular defensive specialists, the scenario plays out differently. First of all, two defensive specialists are required, one to substitute for each middle blocker. Usually the defensive specialist will also serve, so that the middle blockers don't play back row defense for even a single rotation. This results in each of the two back-row specialists playing half the game.

So, how does a coach decide which is better? Many teams will have a back-row player who is clearly better than others on the team. If this is the case, the coach will probably be inclined to use the best defensive player as the libero and keep her in the back row for every rotation allowed.

On the other hand, some defensive specialists are also serving specialists. The libero cannot serve, so a coach might prefer to put this type of player in the game via regular substitutions.

The rules committee debated whether to lift some of the restrictions on the libero, but eventually decided to implement it exactly as in international (FIVB) and men's college rules.

The libero was added internationally with the exclusive goal of improving defensive play, especially in the men's sport, where the offense is so dominant. The game was moving more and more towards putting the tallest possible players on the floor, and relying on jump serves and net play to win games. Many felt that this resulted in a decline in defensive skills on the court, and that the resulting game was becoming boring to fans. Putting a highly skilled defensive player on the court for almost every play was supposed to provide longer rallies and more spectacular digs. They specifically did not want the new position to be used to improve a team's serving, setting, blocking or back-row attacking.

Chuck Erbe was one who wanted the NCAA to allow the libero to be more of a complete player. In particular, he favored permitting the libero to serve

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and attack. "Women's college play is not in dire need of a purely defensive player, in the way the men's game was. We should be looking at all ways of letting all players use their best skills as often as possible, instead of artificially limiting them", he explains.

However, the eight coaches on the rules committee disagreed. Lifting the restriction on the libero serving would have meant that the libero could be used as a full-time server, replacing every player when it was her turn to serve. Trying to limit this, so that she could serve only once per rotation, would require some awkward record-keeping for the official scorekeeper. Eventually, it may have just come down to the feeling that having the NCAA women's libero be different from other liberos would create undesirable confusion for fans.

For now we can only guess what the new position will mean to Spartan fans. For example, it could mean we'll see fewer players get playing time in the back row. At the end of last season, Emmy Miller usually replaced middle blocker Angela Morley in the back row, Emily Engel usually replaced middle blocker Jenny Rood, and Diana Steplyk usually replaced Kim Schram. If a libero were used to replace both middles in the back row, one of those three back-row players might no longer play regularly. But that would mean that Angela and Jenny would now have to serve and play back row for a few rotations every game. In addition, if Emily's serving remains strong, we can expect to see her in as a regular back-row sub, not as a libero.

Speculation aside, the libero has been well received by coaches, fans and players since it was introduced several years ago, and it seems likely to have the same success in NCAA women's play.

President's Corner

by SideOut Club President Jenny Bond

It's almost time! Many of you are probably as excited as I am that the Spring tournaments will begin this month. The team is eager to benefit from our support. They have been getting up early, early morning for Spring practice in preparation. I encourage you to participate in the tournaments if possible although there will not be one on the MSU

campus. My husband and I have attended several of the professional volleyball games in Grand Rapids recently. It is great to see Val Stark, Jenny Whitehead and Courtney DeBolt in uniform again, but we are most eager to see the 2002 MSU Spartan Spikers.

The 2001 team was most appreciative of the SideOut Club efforts, and took the time to express this through the thank you card included in this newsletter. It definitely gives you an indication of how special these young women are and how important the SOC is to them. I requested Lisa and Erin share thoughts on their MSU experience. I know you will enjoy Lisa's comments in this newsletter. Erin's comments will be in the next issue. Savor the players' comments and make a commitment to work hard this year to support the team.

Comments and suggestions needed: The SOC Board took a well deserved break for three months after the banquet. We will meet on March 12 and monthly afterwards to plan future activities. If you have suggestions for our efforts, please email me at jbond@msu.edu or phone at (517)676-2676.

Get this date on your calendar for the year end banquet--December 1, 2002. The final hour and place will be announced later.

Do we have your correct email address? If not, you are missing out on information shared with the membership between newsletters. Use my email address above to get added to our list.

Thanks again for your past support of MSU volleyball via your support of the SOC. We have a very special team and hardworking coaches who will definitely need our help this year in several ways. With the Jenison renovations, the locker room needs are great and are added to those needs for every season. There is a significant gap between what is needed so that we can compete with and recruit the very best in the country and what is available from MSU. The SideOut Club with your help can help decrease this gap! And the team will need our support, caring and love--those cannot be purchased.

Get your MSU volleyball shirts out. See you in Ann Arbor for the Spring tournament!

Jenison Renovation Update

The renovations of Jenison Field House are looking great, but Spartan Volleyball needs some help to furnish the new spaces properly. Towards this goal, you should soon find a letter in your mailbox offering the opportunity to place your name as a sponsor on one of the brand new volleyball lockers.

Chuck says the locker room is going to be beautiful and as well-equipped as they can afford to make it. One of the new facilities is a small player lounge, with furniture and a large TV. It will have a computer area for the players to access the Internet and check their email. The new storage location right in the locker area will also be a convenience they've never had before; no more running to some far-flung part of the building for every little supply item.

The locker room itself will have a video projector and screen, with a satellite TV hookup, cable TV, DVD player, VHS tape and digital video. This will enable the team to view almost any type of training or scouting video that might be available.

To make all this possible, the program hopes to raise \$50,000 by selling sponsorships for the lockers. For a contribution of \$2,500 (tax-deductible, of course) a supporter can sponsor one of the lockers for a ten-year period. An engraved brass plate in the locker will acknowledge the donor by name. If you or someone you know wants to take advantage of this intriguing opportunity, contact Chuck Erbe at 355-4750.

Senior Reflections

by Lisa Ashton, "the #4 alum"

"Don't be afraid to dream dreams, for out of such small things come miracles." This was a card that was given to me when I graduated from high school four years ago. I cherished that quote because I felt as though I was pursuing some dreams that would take miracles to come true. Well, as I continue to say about my experience at MSU, "God has been most gracious!" I came into Michigan State Volleyball as a timid, unsure, small-town walk-on. I was ready for battle because I knew I was in for perhaps my biggest challenge thus far.

I remember my first experience playing with the girls at a college camp in Chicago. They threw me in to play outside hitter...yeah...I think I was what Chuck called a "spectator" to be exact. I was so amazed at the playing ability and the quickness of Big Ten ball that I just stood at the net in awe and forgot to play.....OOPS...next thing I knew the other team ran a slide and I was nowhere to be found to block the ball. I hung my defenders out to dry....and yes, I got called out on it too..."Lisa, what are you trying to do? Get our heads cut off?" I knew at that point I had A LOT of work ahead of me.

Preseason began and I remember when I received all the free stuff that the team kept raving about. We called it Christmas in the fall. When we were putting away our new socks, shoes, shirts etc. in our locker rooms I looked around and noticed girls were marking their clothes with permanent marker. I thought to myself that was a little presumptuous of them. Don't we have to return everything when the season is over? Yep, in the dark about that one too. No Lisa, at Michigan State you get to KEEP what they give you.

Well, now I look back upon the four years and am humbled by the hard work of those that have gone before me and the generosity of people like you that blessed me with an overwhelming amount of gifts. Now when I say gifts I mean support, I mean love, I mean the opportunities we had to travel numerous places (EUROPE!), I mean the food, I mean it ALL! Your club has been most gracious and I want to thank you again for the vital contribution you make to the success of Michigan State Volleyball.

When people ask about my experience playing volleyball for a Big Ten school, I usually tell them two things. It was the hardest challenge of my life and because of that it changed my life tremendously. Nothing can prepare an athlete for college sports. It's a live and learn process. You know somewhere along the line you'll screw up or things won't go your way, but at the same time it's how you deal with the circumstances that makes the difference. I learned the value of trust in relationships, the price for commitment, the power of love in conflicting situations, and to not be ashamed to be vulnerable with those you care about (to name a few).

The biggest difficulty I faced in my career was dealing with my career-ending back injury last season. It was a lot to swallow but thanks to the prayers of family, friends, and you, God helped me through. It made for quite a different season, but a joy at the same time. I believe the Lord used that circumstance for His glory and molded me in ways that would have never happened had I been healthy. My heart has really been led to go into full-time Christian ministry with athletes, which I'll be able to get a real head start on this summer. I just accepted an internship to be head of a sand volleyball league ministry (about 24 teams) for the summer outside of Chicago. I'd be happy to share more details of that to whoever is interested. As far as playing in the league myself, I'm not quite sure. My back is doing SO MUCH better but I don't know how much it can take yet. The biggest blessing is that I can sit through my classes at school now and not be bothered with pain. Slowly but surely, I'll continue to recover.

I plan to graduate in May from the College of Education and then I'll return in the fall to do my year of intern teaching in the Lansing area. I'm sure I will see you at the games next fall. I'll be there. Thanks again for all you continue to do for MSU! You are so dear to my heart. God Bless.

Pro Volleyball Underway

The United States Professional Volleyball league began its inaugural season in February, featuring teams in Grand Rapids, Minneapolis, Chicago and St. Louis. Three ex-Spartans are on the rosters—Val Sterk and Jenny Whitehead for the Grand Rapids Force and Courtney DeBolt for the Chicago Thunder. When we saw Grand Rapids defeat St. Louis on February 24, the lineup for the Force was virtually a Big Ten All-Star team, with Cristy Chapman and Betsy Spicer from Illinois, and Jen Flynn from Ohio State joining Val and Jenny.

Chuck Erbe is enthusiastic about the league. "It's a great concept, coming at a time when there's lots of interest in volleyball in this country", he says. He's hoping it will be a big plus for college volleyball in an indirect way. "It will give extra incentive to seniors to work continually to improve their skills. Male athletes for years have been pulled by the lure of pro leagues,

but most women have not had a similar source of motivation", he explains.

Attendance has been strong so far, topping 2,600 at the last Grand Rapids match. Regular season play continues through April 16, with six more home matches for Grand Rapids, including one that will be played in Kalamazoo. The season will conclude with a playoff series determining the champion in May. USPV can be found on the web at uspv.com, and information is available by calling (616) 456-8778.

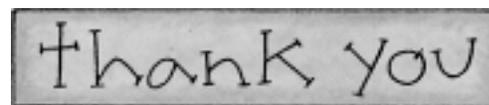
Two Recruits from Illinois

MSU volleyball will have two new recruits for fall 2002. First announced, in the early signing period, was Caroline Belich, a 6-1 outside hitter from Burr Ridge, Illinois. Caroline was a three-year letter winner for coach Joann Pyntz, as well as an honor-roll student at Lyons Township High School. She led her team to conference and regional championships as a junior and senior. She earned all-conference and all-region honors for her efforts, and her squad also reached the sectional finals each of those seasons.

Belich has also competed for the Lions Juniors club team under coach Griffin Fox. During her junior season, she guided her squad to a third-place national finish in Salt Lake City, Utah.

"We're very excited to add Caroline to the Michigan State volleyball program," said Chuck Erbe. "She is a tremendous athlete with a great future. Caroline is a great fit for our program."

Also expected to join the Spartans is 6-1 Jennifer Edwards, a middle/outside hitter from Rockford, Illinois. We'll have more about her in the next issue.



I wanted to share the thank you comments from the team which I received in a card for the entire club membership after the end of the season. I think you will agree that the young women on this team are indeed very special. Now, doesn't this make you glad that you are part of the SideOut Club and MSU Volleyball?
Jenny Bond, SOC President

Coming into this program I did n't know there was such a strong support system. You all make all the difference in helping us succeed. Keep the spirit WICKED

What you guys did @ Ohio State was awesome. Taking lasting support to a new level has been most appreciated. So much of a prayer & words of encouragement while I had a rough season, thank you!

THANKS SO MUCH FOR ALL THE SUPPORT YOU HAVE GIVEN US. WE WOULDN'T BE THE SAME WITHOUT YOU. THANK YOU FOR ALL THE SUPPORT YOU GAVE US. EVERY LITTLE THING YOU DO FOR US IS AMAZING & HELPS OUT SO MUCH. THANK YOU MIKKI #16

Thank you for all the support that you have given us. We loved having you at OSU for our big win and your presence at all our home games. Thank you for believing in us. Emily #11

Thank for your incredible support. Your commitment to our program is awesome! We can't thank you enough. We love you all. It means so much to the team to have you around. We love you!

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Your support through everything has been so important to our team this season. Glad we could show you guys a great win over Ohio State when you were there! Kyle Smiley #2

Thank you so much for all the support. It means so much to the team to have you around. We love you!

VERY VERY MUCH

you all are amazing. your support for us is incredible. I can not thank you enough for everything. There is no way we could do what we do without you all. Thanks again. Emmy #18

THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU, YOUR SUPPORT THROUGH EVERYTHING HAS BEEN SO IMPORTANT TO OUR TEAM THIS SEASON. GLAD WE COULD SHOW YOU GUYS A GREAT WIN OVER OHIO STATE WHEN YOU WERE THERE! KYLE SMILEY #2

Tentative 2002 Schedule

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

8/24	GREEN & WHITE	6:30 pm	10/18	@Wisconsin	
8/30-31	COCA-COLA/MSU VOLLEYBALL CLASSIC		10/19	@Northwestern	
	Georgetown, Oakland, South Carolina		10/25	PURDUE	7:00 pm
9/6-7	@Western Michigan Invitational		10/26	ILLINOIS	7:00 pm
	DePaul, Wright State, Western Michigan		10/30	MICHIGAN	7:00 pm
9/13-14	@South Florida Tournament		11/1	PENN STATE	7:00 pm
	Kansas State, Georgia Tech, South Florida		11/8	@Indiana	
9/20	NORTHERN ILLINOIS		11/9	@Ohio State	
9/27	@Minnesota		11/15	IOWA	7:00 pm
9/28	@Iowa		11/16	MINNESOTA	7:00 pm
10/4	OHIO STATE	7:00 pm	11/22	@Illinois	
10/5	INDIANA	7:00 pm	11/23	@Purdue	
10/9	@Michigan		11/29	NORTHWESTERN	7:00 pm
10/12	@Penn State		11/30	WISCONSIN	7:00 pm
			12/5-12/8	NCAA 1 st & 2 nd round	
			12/13-14	NCAA Regionals	
			12/19-21	NCAA Championships in New Orleans, LA	



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