
The Service Line

Volleyball News from the MSU SideOut Club
Vol. X No. 1
March 2004

Hail and Farewell

The volleyball banquet is always a bittersweet affair, and this year's event at Hawk Hollow on January 17 was no exception. It was sad to have to bid farewell to four players and two coaches who have made lasting contributions to Spartan volleyball. At the same time, it was a pleasure to be able to celebrate their many accomplishments.

Tim Berkey emceed with his usual wit and sense of timing, and awards were numerous and well deserved. Jenny Rood received the hitting percentage award with a .346 mark. Brooke Langston took home the Andrea DeLuca Spirit Award, with Todd Dagenais speaking movingly about the importance of the significance of the award. Nikki Colson was honored with the team's MVP award for a second straight season. Nikki and Emmy Miller were recipients of the Captains' Award.

Michelle Kopka received the grade-point average award for the second straight season and was also chosen to the Academic All-District team. Michelle was one of eight Spartans who earned Academic All-Big Ten recognition, being joined by Mickey Davis, Stephanie Knopp, Brooke Langston, Jenny Rood, Kim Schram, Diana Steplyk and Megan Wallin. All eight players were repeat winners.

In addition, several players were recognized for other distinctions. Kim Schram earned First Team All-Big Ten recognition, AVCA All-Region honors and honorable mention status on the All-America Team. Nikki Colson and Jenny Rood were selected as honorable mention All-Big Ten performers. Kim Schram and Nikki Colson also garnered special awards for career milestones – Kim for 1,000 career kills and Nikki for setting the MSU career assist record.

Players were not the only award-winners. Fran Rood received the SideOut Club's Service Award for her tireless efforts in selling 50/50 tickets. Fran was presented with a custom monogrammed ticket-selling apron. The parents offered special tributes to website announcer John Kreger and SideOut Club members Al and Renee Schmitzer for their generosity in taking and making available photos of the players.

The poignancy of the departure of the senior class was enhanced by the knowledge that two valued members of the coaching staff were also leaving the program. Maren Witzel received a special gift from the SideOut Club to thank her for her efforts as a volunteer coach. Mickey Davis and Diana Steplyk paid a heartfelt tribute to Todd Dagenais.

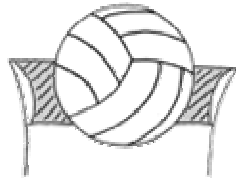
Todd spoke movingly about how much he would cherish his days at MSU and of how much he had learned from and enjoyed coaching with Chuck Erbe and Daune Koester. He recalled that when he first told Chuck Erbe about the opportunity to join the national program, Chuck told him that he couldn't turn down the chance to be part of the Olympics. Nonetheless, it was an agonizing decision for Todd because of his deep attachment to the players and coaches. Todd noted that it was symbolic that he was entering a new stage of his career at the same time that his first recruiting class was graduating.

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Spring Tournaments



It's been three long months since we've been able to see the MSU Volleyball team in action, but fortunately that will soon end. The team will be participating in four one-day spring tournaments, beginning on March 27 at Palos Courts in Chicago and then on April 3 at the University of Pittsburgh. The team will then play host to tournaments at Jenison on April 10 and 17. Opponents will include Michigan, Pitt and Miami of Ohio on the 10th and Eastern, Western, Madonna and Northwood on the 17th.

If you haven't been to a spring tournament, they are well worth attending (and they are free). Last season's seniors do not play, nor do next year's recruits. However, the five freshmen who redshirted in the fall – Tracy Bellwood, Andrea Hansen, Jessica Hohl, Katie Johnson, and Miken Trogdon – are allowed to play, so this may be an opportunity to see them play in a competitive environment for the first time. Play continues throughout the day and there is always something going on. The results do not count toward any standings, allowing teams to experiment with new combinations and new roles for familiar players. However, the players and coaches take the games very seriously as a measure of progress and of what areas need additional attention. The matches also provide an entertaining preview of the fall's play.

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Newsletter Editor:	Peter Morris	517-339-7128
Newsletter Layout:	Kathy Lovell	517-351-1577
President:	Jenny Bond	517-676-2676
Vice-president:	Julie Carmichael	517-676-5211
Secretary:	Ron Springer	517-203-0612
Treasurer:	Jim Ellis	517-323-3566

MSU SideOut Club, P.O. Box 80491, Lansing MI 48908
Email: jandeellis@earthlink.net
Website: www.msusideout.org

Farewell—Cont. from page 1

Then it was time for the seniors to say their farewells. Nikki Colson reminisced about her official visit to Michigan State and how she knew by the end of a trip that this was where she belonged. She offered a humorous account of how she made her commitment to become a Spartan and then broke the news to her parents. Nikki expressed her gratitude to them for their support and to her coaches and teammates.

Stephanie Knopp said that this speech was one she had been thinking about since her freshman year. Like Nikki, Stephanie reflected upon her first recruiting contact from MSU. Stephanie, however, noted that when she got a letter from the coaching staff she laughed at the idea of playing in a state where it snowed! She observed wryly that life sometimes leads you in unexpected directions and fondly described some of the things she would have missed out on had she not chosen MSU.

Emmy Miller spoke of how fortunate she was to have had the opportunity to live a dream. She described watching the 1995 Final Four team as a girl growing up in the Lansing area and barely allowing herself to dream of following in their footsteps. She said that that feeling was reinforced when, at 4'10", she was cut from one of the first teams for which she tried out.

Jenny Rood gave a thoughtful talk that emphasized her appreciation of the opportunity to be a part of a program that she had followed while growing up. She stressed how easy it is to take blessings for granted and described the experience of her friend Liz Cooper, a gifted swimmer who was never able to compete at MSU due to injuries. Jenny spoke of what a powerful reminder that was to her of how fortunate she was and thanked the many people who had helped her to cultivate her athletic talent.

Chuck Erbe closed the proceedings by noting that the four speeches that had just been given exemplified what gave him the greatest pride as a coach. Chuck noted that four individuals who had entered the program as teenagers with great potential were leaving it as mature, poised, self-possessed, articulate women. As much as we will miss them, they are now graduates both of MSU and of the volleyball program who are fully prepared to make their own marks in the world. We can be confident that each of these four exceptional young women will do so, while continuing to embody the trait that each of them touched upon in one way or another in their talks – giving back more than they receive.

President's Corner

By Jenny Bond

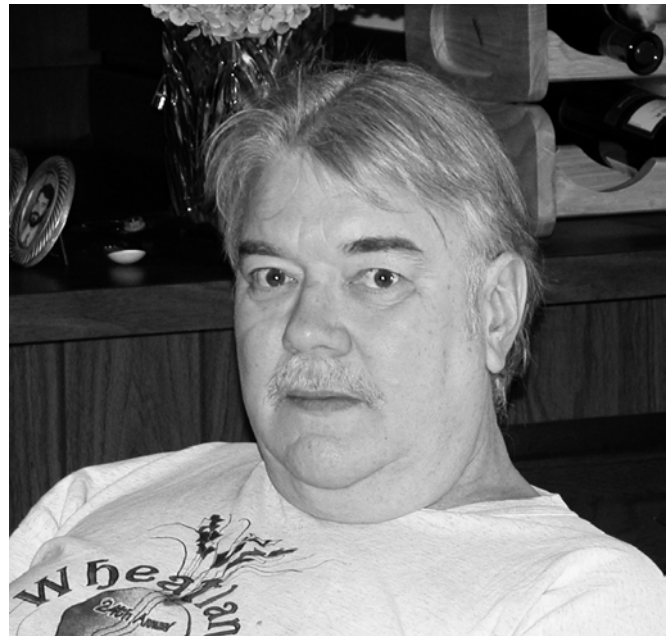
Greetings to each of you! Are you ready for spring? Are you ready for MSU volleyball? My personal answer is a resounding YES on both counts. My husband and I have enjoyed following the MSU women's basketball team during their exciting season and we have seen many other SOC members in Breslin. Our heart belongs to our volleyball team, however. Fortunately there are plans for spring and fall tournaments at home this year, something we have definitely missed during the recent renovations in Jenison.

The 2003 season banquet held in January was a huge success on many fronts. Attendance at this event once again increased over last year. The team looked beautiful with their sophisticated "party" attire, makeup and special hairstyles. Almost all parents were able to attend. The contributions of Al and Renee Schmitzer, the MSU volleyball program's unofficial photographers, added a special touch to the decorations and provided a number of door prizes. They printed great photographs of matches and related events during the past season and used them on cubes in the center of the tables. Several attendees were lucky recipients of the Schmitzers' printed collages of players and matches. Thank you, Al and Renee! Your contributions are priceless – fans and players appreciate them. Other door prizes included 2004 season tickets and volleyball clothing.

A special thank you to the SOC Board and members who assisted with the banquet. One of the highlights of the event was a display of baby/child pictures of the team, which I had obtained from parents without the team's knowledge. I think they were very surprised. Those who missed the banquet will be able to see the display at one of the early matches. Let's see how many you can identify.

The seniors and awards to the team are addressed elsewhere in this newsletter. The SOC recognized Todd Dagenais for his contributions to the program, especially his competence, commitment and enthusiasm. He was presented a carved wooden duck (a donation by a faithful SOC member), which he says he is taking to the Olympics this year. We shall miss Todd and his fiancée, Katie Mitzner, but wish them well. The SOC service award was presented to Fran Rood for her contributions to the club as a "super 50/50 salesperson." In addition to the traditional plaque, Fran received her own monogrammed sales apron. She has promised to continue as a salesperson for the 2004 season.

Cont. on p. 5



Dean Johnson

Longtime MSU volleyball booster Dean P. Johnson passed away in December. Jack Carmichael offers this tribute:

As I sat down to write this brief obituary I realized all the material I had on hand was a synopsis of the Memorial Service. Fortunately, I also have a flood of memories. In particular, I'll never forget Dean's exuberant cheer, heard at all the Spartan home volleyball matches and several away matches: "IT STARTS WITH A PASS AND ENDS WITH A KILL!"

Dean was born February 22, 1947, in Kalamazoo. I first met him on that memorable bus trip to Massachusetts ten years ago when he exhorted the Spartans as they fought in the national final four. Dean's girth prevented him from mixing with the fans throughout the bus, but he held forth from his seat in the front row. Whenever he traveled with us on subsequent road trips, he produced the tape of the fabled come-from-behind victory over Hawaii so we could all relive that glorious moment. As for me, I'll be reminded of Dean Johnson whenever I visit Jenison or step on the bus for an away match at Illinois or Ohio State.

At the Memorial Service the family asked, in lieu of flowers, that his friends and loved ones make a donation to Michigan State University to be earmarked for Spartan Volleyball.

Senior Class Parents

Another bittersweet element of the graduation of a senior class is bidding adieu to parents who have contributed so much to the program and in such a variety of ways.

John and Karen Knopp were limited in the number of games they could attend because they live in California. However, they were always searching the internet for affordable flights and made it whenever possible. Rob Schram recalls that he first met John when he had flown in to help Stephanie move into a new apartment and he notes: "That's a long way to come to move furniture!" It was a pleasure to see them at the tournament in John's hometown of Lincoln, Nebraska, and for Senior Night weekend at Karen's alma mater of Michigan State.

Mike and Nancy Colson have shown extraordinary dedication in their repeated trips from Nebraska to watch Nikki play and I have so many fond memories of both of them. Who, for example, could ever forget the epic halftime hula-hoop contest that featured Anna Miller and Nancy Colson? Sitting next to Nancy at a volleyball match is an extraordinary learning experience because of her limitless knowledge of the game. It can also have a "déjà vu" feel because she anticipates so much of the action before it occurs. Mike's allegiance to the game is of shorter duration, but his expertise is growing. The look on Nancy's face when he yelled "Villy [Sara Villwock], way to tool" during one of last year's matches was priceless. Mike is also responsible for coining the increasingly popular volleyball term "digmeister." While next season will mean much less wear and tear on the Colsons' vehicles, their presence at MSU volleyball games will be greatly missed!



Jerry and Frances Rood have also demonstrated an extraordinary commitment to the program, not missing a single Big Ten match at home or away last season. Fran's dedication in selling 50/50 tickets earned her a richly deserved Service Award from the SideOut Club. Jerry and Fran have sponsored a table at the banquet in each of the past two seasons. The less tangible, but even more valuable moral support that they have provided for players, parents and fans over the past four years is beyond my ability to describe.

Mike and Anna Miller have made their contributions behind the scenes and in ways that might escape the notice of outsiders. Everyone close to the program, however, appreciates them. Nikki Colson made a point in her speech at the banquet of thanking the Millers for becoming surrogate parents to her and other players who were far from home. Jerry Rood adds, "I have had the opportunity to meet a lot of marvelous people at Michigan State and the Millers are right at the top of the scale!" Every player and parent I spoke to raved about the Millers' generosity and hospitality toward both players and parents. These efforts have played no small part in developing such a close-knit group of players and parents.

Behind our four special seniors are eight wonderful parents who have supported not only their daughters, but the entire program. Those contributions have been largely unsung, but are nonetheless enormous. The Roods have promised to be back for matches next season and we sincerely hope that the Millers will do so as well. That is too much to expect of the Knopps and Colsons, but they will be there in spirit.



Newsletter Changes

by Jenny Bond,
SOC President

The MSU SideOut Club celebrates its 10th birthday in 2004 and the Board is working on anniversary activities. This publication is certainly one of the major benefits of SOC membership. I personally think it is the **single** most important thing that has maintained membership and support for the SOC. The force behind the newsletter for more than nine years has been editor **Chris Wolf**. He has written most of the articles, typed and formatted The Service Line and been responsible for its copying, printing and mailing. It has been his vision and many hours of hard work and dedicated service that have led to the consistently high quality and appreciated value of this newsletter. Chris has enlightened all of us with his exceptional volleyball IQ and knowledge of the history of MSU volleyball and the SOC. Thank you Chris.

This newsletter is the first one in the club's history that will not have Chris as the editor. He has agreed to take over responsibility for the SideOut Club website, which was previously carried by Dennis and Amy Eagle. SOC thanks the Eagles for their past contributions. We are pleased that Chris is willing to take over this new assignment. His extensive experience with volleyball and as a web master (he set up his department's web site at MSU, which was one of the first on campus) will be invaluable in this new assignment. Chris will also continue to provide the informational poster on results and standings in the Big 10 and nationally at each match as he has done for many years. Chris has to spend hours on the web getting the current information – at a Saturday match he has the results of matches played Friday night throughout the country – and then getting it into the poster format. Suffice it to say, we have all benefited from Chris Wolf's extensive contributions to the SOC and are so pleased that he will continue his activities with the website and updates.

Peter Morris has agreed to take on the editorship of the newsletter with this issue. I received much good feedback on the feature articles he contributed last year. He and Chris are working closely together so that the transition will go smoothly. **Kathy Lovell**, another SOC Board member, has volunteered to be responsible for the format and layout of the newsletter. John Bond will continue to be in charge of the SOC membership database and will provide mailing labels. Al and Renee Schmitzer have generously agreed to provide pictures for the newsletter.

The new editor wants to stress that he welcomes ideas and articles from members, such as Jack Carmichael's contribution in this issue. I will continue the President's message and short pieces related to SOC activities and announcements. If you have anything to contribute, whether big or small, please contact Peter at moxbib@voyager.net. Our aim will be to continue the newsletter excellence and relevance that Chris Wolf established as the gold standard over the past nine years.

President's Corner—cont. from p. 3

For the first time the SOC invited members of the Court Crew as guests to the banquet. Many of the crew were able to attend and were given a huge thank you by attendees. After the first round of the NCAA tournament in Jenison in December, I learned that the NCAA official in charge had expressed reservations about the ability of the young Court Crew – before she saw them in action. I understand that she was impressed with their performance by the end of the event.

The SOC proudly presented an **\$8000** check to Coach Erbe at the banquet for the volleyball program, which brought the total for the year to **\$10,500**. That represents many contributions by SOC members, including 50/50 sales, merchandise sales, donations and even a contribution of a car that was sold for a \$1000 profit. I do not know how we will match this level of giving in the future but that is our goal. The needs of the program are great and budget cuts continue at the university. SOC support for the volleyball program becomes more important yearly – both our financial and moral support.

SOC members have had some sad moments recently also. You will read elsewhere about Dean Johnson. We also supported Julie Carmichael, our VP and expert bus trip planner, when she lost her very special mother. I was able to represent SOC at the visitation. One of the perks of participating in SOC activities is the friendships developed and the support we receive from each other. This may sound corny but it works!

Last week I saw Mickey Davis and her parents at a local mall. Mickey told me that the team is working hard to be ready for the spring season. I told her that all of us are looking forward to it. She and her parents once again wanted me to thank SOC members for their many contributions to the program.

The Board will be planning events for the new season. We hope that you will share your ideas with us especially if you have fundraising ideas. Do not hesitate to contact me at 517-676-2676 if you have suggestions or comments.

Happy Spring! Happy Volleyball! Go State!

February Madness

In February, I witnessed my alma mater capture a volleyball championship on a Schram kill! That lead must make it sound like the long winter has finally pushed me over the edge, since everyone knows that MSU doesn't play volleyball in February. But as a wise person once said, "I may be paranoid, but that doesn't mean there isn't somebody following me." Similarly, in this case, my eyes did not deceive me.

My undergraduate degree, you see, is from the University of Toronto, where Kim Schram's sister Carrie is a senior outside hitter. Last month I traveled up there to watch the Ontario University Association's Final Four.

Canadian universities do not offer athletic scholarships, and gifted Ontario players like Michelle Kopka, Kim Schram, Stacey Gordon, Dana Cooke and Sarah Pavan often play collegiate volleyball south of the border. However, the quality of play remains high and very entertaining, as it features longer rallies, a great emphasis on passing, and frequent changes in momentum.

The lack of scholarships is partially offset by the University of Toronto's worldwide reputation for academic excellence. One of the team's starters is a seventeen-year-old from Russia who showed up unannounced at the coach's door on the first day of practice. Another is a thirty-year-old single mother whose twelve-year-old son is already playing in a volleyball league. Other players hail from Italy, Spain and Africa, giving the team a United Nations feel.

The mix of cultures is a reflection of the University of Toronto's setting, which could hardly afford a starker contrast from the pastoral beauty of Michigan State. Set in the heart of the bustling downtown district, the campus squeezes an enrollment similar to MSU's into the midst of one of the world's most cosmopolitan cities. Adjoining and often overlapping the campus is the entire range of the human experience. A walk around the outskirts of the campus takes one past museums, the roiling market district of Kensington, the skyscrapers on Bay Street that are home to the country's financial headquarters, and the picturesque diversity of Chinatown and Little Italy. Even parkland rises up suddenly when one approaches Queens' Park, the home of the provincial legislature (although there are no cows or llamas in sight). A short trip on the clean and efficient subway and streetcar system affords a wealth of other options, including Skydome and the CN Tower, shopping opportunities for every scale, Harbourfront and the Toronto Islands, a thriving theatre district, and even a fully restored castle.

The crowds at regular season U of T volleyball matches are small, but the fans are fervent and knowledgeable.

A dynamo named Corrie Allen introduced herself to me

as president of the Carrie Schram Fan Club and informed me matter-of-factly that her allegiance to Carrie is far greater than mine to her sister's. She supported this contention so persuasively that I could offer only the feeblest of counterarguments. These she demolished with the relentless precision of a wrecking ball, leaving me no alternative but to concede the point.

For the OUA Final Four, the usual loyal contingent was joined by a raucous crowd that included an impromptu band from the engineering college. The men's volleyball team – themselves newly crowned OUA champions – led cheers from the front row. On any close line call, they would address jocose inquiries to the nearest linesman ("Are you sure about that, Henry?"), and he would good-naturedly respond in kind. The crowd demonstrated similar hospitality toward their opponents, chanting "Warm Up the Bus" whenever victory appeared to be at hand. Warmth is, understandably, a word that has a special resonance for Canadians in February.

In Toronto's semifinal match against McMaster, they dropped the first game but roared back to win the next two. In the fourth game, Toronto held an apparently comfortable lead and the student section began to issue the customary helpful instructions to the McMaster bus driver about providing sufficient heat to ensure the player's comfort. Other students showed a similar concern about the team's journey home by holding up signs with arrows and the words "This Way Back to McMaster." The variety of different directions in which they pointed these signs belied the prestigious academic reputation of their school.

The McMaster players had different ideas, however, and made a stirring comeback to force a fifth game. In the deciding game, Toronto regrouped and played flawlessly to punch their tickets to the finals against Guelph.

On the next evening, Carrie Schram spurred her school to victory in the first game with seven clutch kills. Guelph put up a stirring fight in the second game, but Toronto staved off three game points and prevailed. That proved a back-breaker for Guelph and Toronto dominated the third game. Carrie drove home the championship-winning kill, which was #14 of the match for her – a fitting total, since it is Kim's uniform number.

Carrie was delighted that her final matches at the U of T Athletic Centre were played in front of so supportive an atmosphere. It was a well-deserved tribute. Carrie Schram somehow juggles the enormous time constraints of collegiate volleyball in a schedule that also includes a demanding course load, making applications for medical school, and taking the MCAT. This is the epitome of playing volleyball for the love of the game!

Maren Witzel

The MSU Volleyball program will lose another valued and dedicated member this year in Maren Witzel. Maren arrived in East Lansing seven years ago from Palmer, Alaska, and has contributed to the program in an astonishing variety of ways. After a redshirt season, she played for the Spartans for three years, earning Academic All-Big Ten honors in 1998 and 1999. When a foot injury forced her to forego her final season of eligibility, Maren wanted to remain close to the program and served as a student-coach while completing her B.A. in elementary education.

The following year, Maren coached at Concordia University in St. Paul, Minnesota. However, MSU remained in her thoughts and she traveled to Notre Dame to cheer on the Spartans as they earned their berth in the NCAA Sweet Sixteen. This past season, Maren returned to East Lansing as a volunteer assistant coach at MSU, while also coaching for the Lansing Area Volleyball Association and working on a master's degree.

During matches, Maren could be seen at the scorer's table or in the stands working on a laptop. While it might reasonably be guessed that she was catching up on homework, the work on the laptop was another of her contributions to MSU Volleyball. Maren was gracious enough to take time out of her busy schedule to explain.

Maren uses a program that is being used by an increasing number of schools around the country, as well as the national team. Of course the program doesn't actually track the play, and on each point Maren enters an extensive amount of data: who served, who passed (and how well they pass), who attacked and where they attacked from, where the shot went, and whether it resulted in a dig, kill or error. Needless to say, this presents a lot of work, especially on a long rally, and early in the season it took all of her focus to record the data accurately. As the season wore on, she became increasingly comfortable with it.

The program uses the information that Maren inputs to compile a number of graphs and charts, including a shot chart. She explains that the shot chart "can be helpful during a match but most of the time, if the pattern is that apparent, then the girls or coaches on the bench are more than likely able to pick up on it also."

The much greater benefit comes when the coaches and players analyze and review a match. The coaching staff uses the program's information to break down the videotape of the match in whatever way seems most appropriate. Using the videotape to illustrate the patterns documented on Maren's laptop is a very effective means of conveying how to recognize and anticipate attacking patterns.

Maren will not be coaching at MSU next season because she will be fulfilling the student-teaching requirements for her teaching certificate. She will continue to coach as much as her schedule permits, explaining, "I think that I would go into serious withdrawal if I did not coach at all or at least remain in the sport." When asked if coaching changes her perspective on her playing days, she replied: "It more changes your current perspective. I think that I had a firm grasp of what I needed to do as a player in order to be successful. My challenge now, as a coach, is to put my players in a position to learn the same skills I did or should have."

She had a similarly thoughtful response when asked about her fondest memories: "my favorite aspect of sports is goosebumps. I'm sure that you all have felt them at times – the awesome goosebumps you get when watching any athlete or team achieve success at their particular job. I absolutely love this and this is why I remain involved in sports. It's those matches, or plays, or digs that give me goosebumps and make me keep going."

Fortunately, Maren will not be too far away next season, as she adds: "I'm sure that all of you will see me at plenty of games and events next season as I am still going to be in the area. This program is a huge part of me and no matter where I am in the future, I will always be cheering it on!"

February Madness—cont. from p. 6

The win allows University of Toronto to advance to the eight-team national championships in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Carrie noted with a wry smile that a trip to Saskatchewan in March doesn't quite have the same ring as the trip that MSU earned to Southern California for last year's Sweet Sixteen. Even super-fan Corrie Allen has reluctantly decided not to attend. But Carrie Schram is delighted to have extended her career and I feel privileged to have witnessed this fitting reward for all her sacrifices.

NEW COACH HIRED!

With Todd Dagenais leaving MSU to coach with the national team program, Chuck Erbe announced the promotion of Daune Koester to the first assistant position and the addition of Ed Tolentino to the staff.

Daune Koester will add the responsibilities of lead recruiter and running the summer camp to her existing duties of supervising the team's outside hitters, defense, and passing. Chuck Erbe noted that the promotion was a fitting recognition of the many valuable contributions that Daune has made during her three years at MSU.

Chuck and Daune are delighted to be able to add a coach with the background and experience of Ed Tolentino to

the staff. Ed served as first assistant at Eastern Michigan and as head coach at Oakland University, and has also worked for USA Volleyball. He also coached at Bishop Foley High School in Madison Heights and Cranbrook Kingswood High School in Bloomfield Hills. He played volleyball at Macomb College as a defensive specialist and setter, and holds a Bachelor of Science degree in sports medicine from Detroit Mercy. Ed's responsibilities will include assisting Daune with recruiting, organizing and supervising travel, and leading the program's technological initiatives.

Chuck Erbe commented, "This is an outstanding staff and I'm pleased to have the opportunity to work with Daune and Ed in their new roles."

**Spring Tournaments are scheduled for April 10 and April 17
—see page 2 for more information—**



**P.O. Box 80491
Lansing, MI 48908**