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# The Service Line

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Volleyball News from the MSU SideOut Club  
Vol. X No. 3  
September 2004



## Big Ten Dominance

The Big Ten season is about to start, which always brings a high level of competition and renews heated rivalries. This year's non-conference results make a strong case for the Big Ten as the country's best volleyball conference. Minnesota, after wins over powerhouses Kansas State, Colorado State, Northern Iowa and Florida, was ranked number one in the country in the September 13 poll. Penn State, undefeated and having beaten Stanford on their home court, was fifth in the same poll. Illinois was ranked ninth in the country after having ended USC's two-year unbeaten streak. Ohio State, Purdue and Wisconsin have all been ranked during the early going and all have beaten Georgia Tech, a Top Ten team last year.

Michigan State's non-conference results included both ups and downs. The Coca-Cola/MSU Volleyball Invitational – featured later in the newsletter – saw the Spartans at the top of their game against strong competition. The next two weekends saw MSU take on another tough slate in hostile environments, and the results show the importance of boisterous fan support at Jenison. Nonetheless the rugged schedule should serve as good preparation for the Big Ten season, which started on September 24 (after this issue went to press). Every match will require a total team effort and each victory will be a cause for celebration.

Last season Penn State won the Big Ten title but Minnesota advanced to the Final Four of the NCAA Tournament. There's even more reason this year to expect that several Big Ten teams will be able to go deep in the tournament, which will keep interest intense. Even a team in the middle of the conference pack will have a very realistic chance of not just getting into the Tournament but making some noise once they get there. Don't miss a match this year as the Spartans battle it out against what is arguably the nation's strongest conference!

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### Annual Business Meeting—Oct. 23

October 23 will be a big day for SOC members. Cathy Caswell's article below provides details about that day's tailgate, which will begin at 3:30 PM. Once you've had your fill of food and drink, **please join us at 5:30 for our Annual Business Meeting**, where Board members will be elected. It is important that you participate and share your ideas and support. If you have any questions about the annual meeting, e-mail me at [jbond@msu.edu](mailto:jbond@msu.edu) or phone me at (517) 676-2676. After the meeting, Michigan State will be taking on Northwestern at 7:00.

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### Volleyball Tailgate – October 23

*By Cathy Caswell*

Come out to join fellow MSU fans for the 5<sup>th</sup> annual Spartan Volleyball Tailgate Party on Saturday, October 23, before the match against Northwestern.

Join us on the green in the south parking lot of Jenison (in front of the main entrance) starting around 3:30 pm, until game time at 7. Bring a dish or grill-able items to share, and grill, eat and drink with other volleyball fans.

I also need about three people to bring a grill and charcoal. If you are able to do that, please let me know. You can call me at 332-4353 or e-mail me at [caswell@msu.edu](mailto:caswell@msu.edu).

SEE YOU THERE!

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## Meet the Freshmen: Meghan Schoen



This is the first in a series of profiles of the three newest additions to the Michigan State volleyball program. This month we introduce Meghan Schoen, a 6' 2" middle hitter from Aurora, Colorado, whose path to East Lansing has been quite unusual.

Meghan was born in Denver and is the only child of Gary and Dawn Schoen. From grades 4 through 8, Meghan attended a small charter school for academically gifted children and did not play any team sports. She instead took up TaeKwonDo when she was 7, and was soon excelling. She was a two-time national TaeKwonDo champion in 2000 and 2001 and a member of the Junior Olympic Team. She was featured in Sports Illustrated's Faces in the Crowd column in the July 30, 2001 issue. She is currently a second-degree Black Belt. In 2003 she was prepared to test for her third-degree; however, she has had to postpone testing for the next level because it involves breaking cement with her bare hands – not a good idea for a volleyball player!

When Meghan decided to attend high school at Cherry Creek High School, a school of over 3,300, she asked her parents' advice on how to adapt. They suggested she go out for a sports team. Due to her height, basketball or volleyball seemed to make sense. Meghan selected volleyball without knowing whether she'd even be good enough to make the freshman team at a sport that she'd never played, other than some practice in the park.

Not only was she good enough – she was a three-year letter-winner for Cherry Creek and a first-team all-state selection as a senior. She was also soon invited to play club volleyball, first at the Front Range Club and then at the Colorado Performance Club.

Meghan was selected as the Denver Post's Student-Athlete of the Week on September 7, 2003. Their article noted that, in addition to her accomplishments on the court, she carried a 4.1 grade point average and was a member of the National Honor Society. She reported that her favorite subject was English, and that she was interested in a career in law, possibly involving sports contracts.

For now she is concentrating on her own athletic career, which has gotten off to an auspicious start at Michigan State. After being named MVP at MSU's summer camps, the coaches decided that they could not afford to redshirt Meghan and she has already seen considerable playing time.

Coach Chuck Erbe observes, "Meghan is a great athlete who has her best volleyball ahead of her in college. She has developed her skills in a championship club program and will bring her drive and commitment to Michigan State. I expect Meghan to be a strong force in our program throughout her career."

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### MSU SideOut Club Is 10 Years Old!

*By SideOut Club President Jenny Bond*

When Chuck Erbe arrived on the MSU campus, he saw the need for a volleyball booster club and contacted a number of diehard area volleyball players and fans who agreed to help. They worked very hard to establish the club, including the following activities: developing by-laws, merchandise sales, membership applications and enrollment, bus trips, coach's luncheons and designing a logo. The original officers were Dianna Kaplinski, Tim Chamness, Chris Wolf and Cathy Caswell, with Bob Alim-Young, Mick Kelly, Mace Ezell and Dee Telman completing the first Board. Chris, Cathy, Bob, Mick and Mace continue as SOC members in 2004.

Chris Wolf served as the club secretary for more than two years. He started this newsletter when he developed a one-page, two-sided sheet of announcements of club events. For **nine – yes, nine** – years he served at the editor of The Service Line. When Peter Morris became editor in 2004, Chris took charge of the SOC website and continues his excellent reporting of the MSU VB program and women's VB nationally. Thank you Chris for your many years of service to the SideOut Club!

More history to come in the next issue.

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### *The Service Line*

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## Spartan Profile: Diana Steplyk

When senior outside hitter and defensive specialist Diana Steplyk talks, there is one word that seems to come to her lips repeatedly. It's not that she has a limited vocabulary – on the contrary, she is a thoughtful and articulate young woman who received the Provost's Award in 2001 as MSU's Freshman Student-Athlete of the Year and was an Academic All-Big Ten selection in 2002 and 2003. It's just that the word *opportunity* is absolutely central to her outlook on the world.

Diana's longstanding involvement with MSU's community outreach programs is a perfect example. The demands of academics and athletics would be enough to keep most people busy, but Diana is one of a number of Spartan volleyball players who regularly finds time to visit local schools and hospitals. Her bubbly, outgoing personality is ideal for promoting events ranging from Bike Helmet Day to making the day of a hospital patient.

Characteristically, she looks at such events not as a duty but as a reminder that "we're really lucky." And in sharing the credit, she brings up that o-word: "The SASS [Student-Athletic Support Services] figures out all the details and e-mails them to us, so for us it's just a great opportunity."

Last year, she was pen pal with a class of students at Okemos' Cornell Elementary School. When she visited the school, the children peppered her with a wide range of questions. One awestricken youngster wanted to know if she could jump high enough to touch the classroom ceiling. Diana looked at the ceiling and realized that she could touch it without jumping, but she good-naturedly made a leap. The extra effort will be no surprise to anyone who has watched Diana on the volleyball court.

Another student asked Diana if she could come back the following week to watch the students' presentations. The teacher explained to the class what a busy schedule a student-athlete has and apologized to Diana for the imposition. But for Diana, it wasn't an imposition but another opportunity. She promised she'd check her schedule and when it turned out that she was free, she returned to watch the presentations.

The same attitude is evident in her approach to sports. Diana began competing at gymnastics at age three and continued in the sport until her freshman year of high

school. Then, she ruefully acknowledges, "I grew too tall." But, typically, she is quick to add that she has no regrets because "gymnastics made me the athlete I am today" and have helped her remain free of injuries. She is equally quick to express gratitude to the people who made that opportunity possible: "I'm so grateful to my mom and dad and my sister Hayley for all the mornings they got up at four a.m. so I could compete."

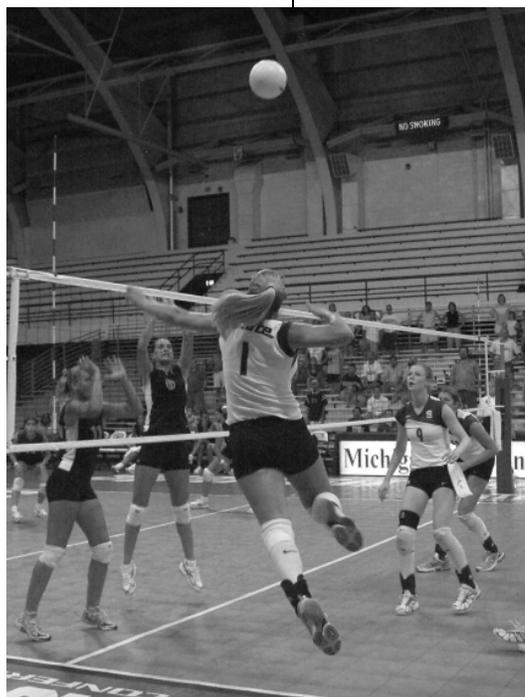
Once Diana grew too tall for gymnastics, she redirected her considerable energies into two sports where her height was an advantage: basketball and volleyball. At Libertyville High School, she was twice selected to the first-team Illinois All-State volleyball team and received the school's volleyball MVP and best athlete awards three times each. During her junior year, she committed to play volleyball at Michigan State.

In her first three years at MSU, Diana has seen action at both outside hitter and defensive specialist and has become a fan favorite with her all-out hustling style. Jenny Rood says, "Diana is one of the most intense players I've ever played with. She's so driven, and every time she takes to the floor she gives everything she has, both emotionally and physically." That hustle exemplifies her attitude that every time she sets foot on the court is an opportunity.

What is even more impressive is that she also views time on the sideline as an opportunity to contribute. During her freshman year, Diana and Kim Schram shared playing time, with Diana rotating in for the backcourt and Kim for the frontcourt. The two players marked each exchange with a hop, a high five and a big smile. Diana explains that this was their way of saying that, instead of one of them feeling disappointed about coming out of the game, that player was passing her energies along to her teammate.

All of her teammates benefit from that energy. Jenny Rood explains: "every time Di is out on the court, she brings her energy with her ... but really, that's just Di. It's just her personality. She's such a blast to play with! She's always trying to give her teammates every ounce of what she has to give. When I think of Di, I think of someone who gives until she can't give anymore."

Diana has kept that same attitude whenever her role has been to watch from the sidelines. Last year, she and several teammates devised a little celebration for each MSU roof that helped keep everyone energized. — *Cont. on page 4*



**Diana scoring the final tournament point at the Coca-Cola/MSU Tournament**

*Photo: Al and Renee Schmitzer*

## Diana Steplyk *(continued from page 3)*

She has worked hard this off-season and hopes to earn more playing time this year but is mature in her outlook. Being a team, she observes, “is what it’s all about” and team goals are always more important than individual ones.

Diana notes with pride how deep this year’s team is and that the nature of collegiate volleyball is that there are always more players on the sideline than there are on the court. She understands that those players too have a very important opportunity: to offer emotional support for their teammates, to be prepared to go in when needed, to watch the action and learn more about the game, and to apply those lessons in each practice and, by providing intense competition, help every player on the team to improve.

Such a grounded attitude reflects her closely knit family, which consists of her father Tony, her mother Judy and her younger sister Hayley. When asked about her goals, Diana Steplyk responds simply, “to make my parents and my sister proud, and to be a good role model to Hayley.”

Diana’s habit of looking at everything in life as an opportunity should not be confused with naïveté. She has encountered setbacks and obstacles more serious than growing too tall for gymnastics, but rather than avoiding those subjects, she brings them up and discusses them without hesitation. The most difficult experiences have been her father’s heart surgery two years ago and her sister’s torn acl, which were all the more frustrating for Diana because her obligations at school meant that she couldn’t offer as much support as she would have liked.

Diana is quick to note that everything happens for a reason, and that both of these times of great pain led to moments of great joy. She says that one of the happiest moments of her life was seeing her father for the first time after his surgery at a volleyball match at Iowa. Hayley too has bounced back and is following her sister’s example as a freshman on the volleyball team at Dartmouth College in the Ivy League. One assumes that it’s just a coincidence that Dartmouth’s school colors are green and white. But if schoolchildren in Hanover, New Hampshire, are awed by a young woman jumping up to touch the ceiling of their classroom – even though she probably could touch it with less effort – that will be no coincidence!

Another instance of the benefits of looking at obstacles as opportunities is shown in her schoolwork. Although a Dean’s List student in Finance, Diana is constantly looking for courses that will challenge her rather than protect her grade point average. She took a particularly difficult course this summer and received a grade that was disappointing by her high standards. Nonetheless, she considers it to have been a valuable experience because she learned a lot from the class that will help her down the line.

She similarly looks at experiences outside the classroom as – you guessed it – opportunities for learning. When one of her friends wrote a paper on Title IX, Diana became fascinated with the subject and began doing her own research. She ended up presenting the results to her volleyball teammates because she thought there was such an important message – that the opportunity to play college sports was one that had not been available to earlier generations of women.

When asked about her fondest memories at MSU, Diana noted that there are many specific ones, including the Sweet Sixteen appearance two years ago. But more than anything, she notes that what she “wouldn’t trade for anything” is being part of a big family of great teammates, coaches, parents and supporters. She is particularly proud of having been part of a record recruiting class of seven players, each of whom is still on the team and each of whom has earned Academic All-Big Ten recognition. She says that she and fellow seniors Kim Schram and Michaela Kopka have done a lot of bonding this summer and are intent on making sure that their last year includes many more memories.

Spartan fans will have equally fond memories of Diana Steplyk, including her ever-present smile, her diving all over the court, and her support of her teammates. All of those traits come from the same source – Diana’s resolute belief that, if you only look hard enough, any experience can be turned into an opportunity.

### Coach’s Luncheons

#### When:

Saturday, October 2  
 Friday, October 22  
 Friday, October 29  
 Friday, November 12  
 Saturday, November 27

#### Where:

Damon’s at 1601 W. Lake Lansing Road  
 (near the 127 exit)

## Coca-Cola/MSU Volleyball Invitational Recap

The 2004 Coca-Cola/MSU Volleyball Invitational, held at Jenison Fieldhouse on Labor Day weekend, was a rousing success. The Spartans were as hot as the weather, capturing all three of their matches by 3-0 margins. Just as importantly, they gave many indicators of being way ahead of schedule in replacing the key losses from last year's squad.

Although none of Michigan State's three opponents were ranked, each school has a winning tradition and represented a formidable test. St. John's is coming off a 26-9 mark in the Big East in 2003. Ohio University went 28-5 and captured the MAC title in 2003, before losing to powerhouse Kansas State in the NCAA Tournament. Florida A&M returned all of its starters from a team that went 27-4 in 2003 and advanced to the second round of the NCAA Tournament. Since their visit to East Lansing, A&M stunned mighty Nebraska on their home court and Ohio University posted a convincing neutral-site win over highly ranked Pepperdine.

What made the tournament particularly satisfying was that MSU's success was the result of a total team effort. Only four Spartans appeared in all 3 matches and each was selected to the All-Tournament team:

**Kim Schram** was selected tournament MVP for her 53 kills and stellar .392 hitting percentage. Kim nicely complemented her hallmark spikes with a mixture of cunning off-speed shots that left defenders looking helpless. She also showed how hard she has worked to develop her all-around game by contributing 9 aces, 7 blocks and 24 digs.

**Megan Wallin** shattered the MSU single-game record for hitting percentage with a .929 mark against St. John's. For the tournament, Megan hit a sizzling .452 and added a team-leading 11 blocks.

**Maggie Griffin** showed poise and composure beyond her years in directing the offense during the first three matches of her collegiate career. She dished out 135 assists over the weekend and made just as big a contribution on the defensive end. Over and over again, opponents tried the old isolate-the-setter trick and Maggie responded by making their attackers eat paste.

**Marley Bellwood's** selection to the All-Tournament team was especially satisfying, because digmeisters rarely earn such recognition. But Marley's performance was simply too good to overlook. Starting by matching her career high with 20 digs against Ohio, she pinballed all over the court to repeatedly save balls that seemed sure to hit the floor.

These four were far from the only contributors. **Michaela Kopka**, **Brooke Langston** and **Diana Steplyk** turned in solid performances, with Diana notching the championship-clinching kill.

Three freshmen – **Andrea Hansen**, **Katie Johnson** and **Meghan Schoen** – were also impressive in their debuts in green and white.

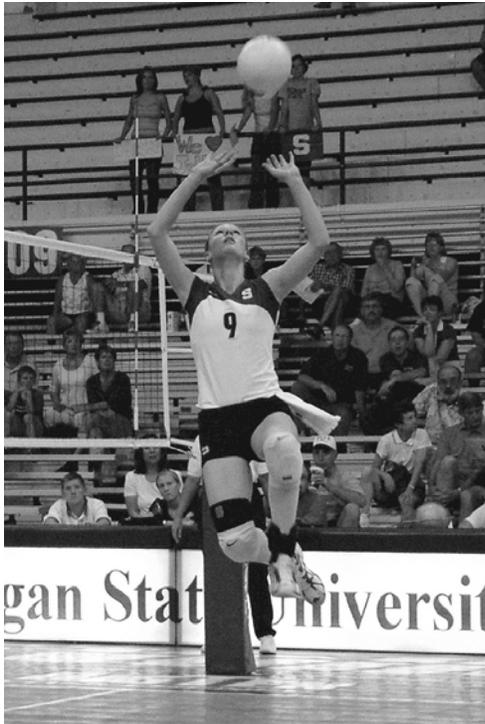
Perhaps the most encouraging element of the Coca-Cola/MSU Volleyball Invitational was how well the players worked together. Chuck Erbe commented that "The team dynamic was excellent. The chemistry didn't change, regardless of who was on the floor." That was demonstrated by how well the team did the little things, such as passing, going up in unison on blocks and keeping the ball alive in scrambles. It's tough to win a game if you have to do 30 "big things" each game – a far more successful formula is to do the little things well and force your opponents into mistakes.

Nothing exemplified this better than Michigan State's 8 hitting errors in the championship match against Florida A&M, the Spartans' lowest total for a match since the 2000 season. Hitting errors are an underrated statistic and they are, for several reasons, a great indicator of teamwork. The most obvious reason is that virtually every player contributes directly to the total by making disciplined attacks.

Just as importantly, many players have an indirect role in a hitting error. Sometimes a hitting error is just a mistake by the attacker, but other times it's the result of more subtle causes. The block on the previous attack may have been a little slow, the ensuing pass a tad short, the set a little high – any or all of these factors can force the attacker to make an adjustment to their swing and be charged with an error. These little things are not always obvious to spectators, but one thing should be apparent: when a team has only 8 hitting errors in an evening, they are doing the little things splendidly!

A final way in which hitting errors are indicative of team play is through offensive diversity. If a team has only one strong offensive threat on a particular rotation, the opponents will be waiting for that player with a double block, which naturally leads to hitting errors. That's why it was so important to see MSU getting offensive productivity from so many different players in their three matches, including more back-row attacking than we have seen in years. With the opposing blockers having to respect 2, 3 or even 4 options on each rotation, every attacker was getting the ball in an optimal situation.

The season-opening tournament thus featured many impressive individual performances by Michigan State, but the best sign of all may have been the team play. The Coca-Cola/MSU Volleyball Invitational was only the beginning for MSU Volleyball's 2004 campaign, but there could be no better foundation upon which to build than a sterling team effort.



## Friends in High Places

In this photo, taken by SideOut Club webmaster Chris Wolf, Michigan State freshman Maggie Griffin is setting during her first collegiate match against Ohio University. In the upper left hand corner, you can see two of Maggie's childhood friends from St. Charles, Illinois, cheering her on. Jane Birkinbine and Marianne Soliz, both of whom are now students at MSU, are holding a sign that reads "WE LOVE JOLLY." Why Jolly? Maggie's nickname while growing up was Jolly, because she was always tall for her age and reminded her friends of the Jolly Green Giant. Obviously, she was destined to wear the green and white!

## President's Message

*By SOC President Jenny Bond*

Greetings! We congratulate you on your wise choice to join the SideOut Club for 2004-2005. We welcome especially the players' parents; a SOC goal annually is to have 100% of them as members. It was good to see many of you at the Green and White and Coca Cola/MSU Invitational matches and to see the team in competition again. What a pleasure to have our freshmen (including the redshirts) on the court.

John and I are in South Carolina as I write this, where we saw the team lose two matches, unfortunately. We were disappointed that Southern Cal canceled out at the last minute due to concerns about Hurricane Ivan. We had some things to cheer about, however. We saw Marley and Tracy Bellwood playing in the back row simultaneously and a number of the younger team members demonstrate their skills. At times there were 4-5 freshmen on the court when we won games.

It was a real pleasure to see Megan Wallin's father enthusiastically cheering the team, as we recall how ill he was during the 2002 season. Continue to cheer, Tom! We hope you get to East Lansing often so many fans can join you in your foot-stomping.

We are also thankful that your family escaped most of the effects of recent hurricanes. It is hard for most of us to think about taking 19 hours and \$1500 of plywood to protect our homes as you did.

Plan to attend the coach's luncheons on Saturday, October 2; Friday, October 22, and Friday, October 29 – all of them start at 11:30 AM at Damon's on Lake Lansing Road. The coach's luncheon prior to the Green and White match was very successful and Chuck Erbe spent more than two hours with the group. We had very good attendance including the Steplyks and many first-time attendees. Do not hesitate to join us for one of these sessions – we are a friendly group and better informed afterward.

Give some thought to how you can contribute to the SOC and MSU volleyball this year. If every member of the SOC agreed to help with just one activity, we could accomplish much. The 2004 team is worthy of our support.

Go State!  
*Jenny Bond*

## SOC Merchandisers are Pros!

*By Jenny Bond*

This is the first in a series to introduce SOC Board members. Jim Constandt and Dennis Eagle provide a valuable service as the merchandising pros! Their role is the key to helping the club with a major fundraiser – merchandise sales. Jim orders, inventories and stores (bless him – I think he has an entire room dedicated to SOC in his home) all the merchandise. Dennis Eagle has a major role in set-up for each match and sales. Both are usually at the table for every home match. What a contribution to the program!

Jim has been a SOC member for 10 years, has been on the Board for 8 years, and in charge of merchandising for 7 years. He is the longest-serving member of the SOC Board since its inception. Jim works as a financial specialist in the budget office of the Department of Education, State of Michigan, where he has 28 years of service. He also works with the MSU Sports Information Department as an official scorer for men's basketball. He is an off-ice official in hockey and an on-field liaison to the press box for football. Bless him, he works very hard for the spikers just for the love of it.

Jim is a volunteer press officer with the US Olympic Committee and has worked the Olympic Games in Seoul, Korea; Lillehammer, Norway; Nagano, Japan; Atlanta and Salt Lake City. He was on the executive staff of the Detroit Junior Wings hockey team prior to linking with MSU Sports Information, which in turn connected him with the USOC.

When you make your next purchase from Dr. James Constandt at the SOC sales table, recognize that you are being served by a talented individual who is totally committed to MSU Volleyball and the SideOut Club Board. You might also want to ask him about his volunteer experiences in Honduras and on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation with his church, where he built and repaired schools and built bunk beds, respectively.

Dennis Eagle has served on the SOC Board for six years and can be found at the merchandise table during most matches. Because he is tall, he has the job of setting up the volleyball net on which the merchandise is displayed. He and Jim arrive very early to get the merchandise out and stay late until all is packed away.

Dennis also works for the State of Michigan. He “moonlights” as an accomplished singer, participating in choruses, opera and solo concerts. In fact, I have recommended that we get him to sing the national anthem at some of the matches. We will see if that happens in the future. You may also see Dennis's wife Amy and their two adorable children near the merchandising table. The kids are learning very early to appreciate MSU volleyball.

Thank you, Jim and Dennis, for your extensive and important contributions to the MSU SideOut Club and to the volleyball program. We just do not know what we would do without you!



Jim Constandt and Dennis Eagle selling merchandise at the SOC sales table. At right, Chris Wolf and Cathy Caswell are checking out the merchandise and talking with Dennis.

*Photo by Jenny Bond*

## FALL SCHEDULE

Day	Date	Opponent	TV	Time
Fri	09/24/2004	@Minnesota*		8:00 PM
Sat	09/25/2004	@Iowa*		8:00 PM
Fri	<b>10/01/2004</b>	<b>INDIANA*</b>		7:00 PM
Sat	<b>10/02/2004</b>	<b>PURDUE*</b>		7:00 PM
Wed	10/06/2004	@Michigan*		7:00 PM
Sat	10/09/2004	@Illinois*	FOX	8:00 PM
Fri	10/15/2004	@Ohio State*		7:00 PM
Sat	10/16/2004	@Penn State*	ESPN2	7:00 PM
Fri	<b>10/22/2004</b>	<b>WISCONSIN*</b>		7:00 PM
Sat	<b>10/23/2004</b>	<b>NORTHWESTERN*</b>		7:00 PM
Wed	<b>10/27/2004</b>	<b>MICHIGAN*</b>		7:00 PM
Fri	<b>10/29/2004</b>	<b>ILLINOIS*</b>		7:00 PM
Fri	11/05/2004	@Purdue*		7:00 PM
Sat	11/06/2004	@Indiana*		7:00 PM
Fri	11/12/2004	IOWA*		7:00 PM
Sat	<b>11/13/2004</b>	<b>MINNESOTA</b>		8:00 PM
Fri	11/19/2004	@Northwestern		8:00 PM
Sat	11/20/2004	@Wisconsin	FOX	8:00 PM
Fri	11/26/2004	PENN STATE		7:00 PM
Sat	11/27/2004	OHIO STATE		7:00 PM

## Tournament results

Date	Opponent	Result
09/03	Ohio University	W 3-0
09/04	St. John's	W 3-0
09/04	Florida A&M	W 3-0
09/10	Arkansas	W 3-1
09/10	Wichita State	W 3-2
09/11	Washington	L 0-3
09/17	Notre Dame	L 1-3
09/18	South Carolina	L 2-3

### NCAA Tournament

Dec. 2-5—NCAA First Round  
 Dec. 9-12—NCAA Second Round  
 Dec. 16-18—NCAA Third Round

*NOTE: In the schedule at left, home games are in bold capital letters. All home games are at Jenison Fieldhouse.*



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