



# The Service Line

Volleyball News from the MSU SideOut Club  
Vol. XII No. 1  
March 2006

## Spring Tournaments

Spartan fans will have their first glimpse of the 2006 Spartans in competition on Saturday, April 8 when

MSU will host Ferris State and Northwood University. A double round-robin will be played, with the action starting at 10 a.m. There is no charge for admission. The schedule is as follows:

- |       |                     |
|-------|---------------------|
| 10 am | MSU v. Northwood    |
| 11 am | Northwood v. Ferris |
| Noon  | MSU v. Ferris       |
| 1 pm  | MSU v. Northwood    |
| 2 pm  | Northwood v. Ferris |
| 3 pm  | MSU v. Ferris       |

### SOC Activities



Jim Ellis, treasurer of SOC Board, presents a check to Coach Cathy George at the banquet.

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Each match will consist of three games to 30 points, so it is possible that the games will run a little behind or ahead of schedule.

The Spartans' spring schedule will also include a tournament at Kent State the following Saturday and will conclude with a twenty-four-team tournament at the Great Lakes Center in Aurora, Illinois, on April 22. Other participants at that tournament will include powerhouses like Florida, Tennessee and many Big Ten squads.

Spring tournaments do not count in the standings, and of course teams cannot use players from next year's freshman class. They can, however, use transfers who are already enrolled in classes, so this will be the first chance for Spartans fans to see Allison Ianni wearing an MSU uniform. Don't miss it!

### A Note from the New Editor

*This is Peter Morris's final issue as newsletter editor, and Pam Sievers will be taking over as the new editor of The Service Line with the August issue. Kathy Lovell will continue to handle the layout. Pam sends along these words of introduction.*

I remember my first MSU volleyball game. I moved here late in the summer of 2001 and my neighbors began inviting me immediately. That fall was filled with getting settled in a new community and starting a new job, and I just couldn't find the time. I finally accepted an invitation in late November and I couldn't believe what I was seeing. How disappointed I was that there was only one game left!

Here it is 4 1/2 years later and I've decided that now, I can be the editor of *The Service Line*. Why? I LOVE THIS GAME and I want to do my part to support the program, spread the word and help more people discover that these are the most selfless athletes on this campus.

So, can I fill Peter's shoes? I doubt it. Peter Morris has done an incredible job as did Chris Wolf before him in producing a well-written, informative newsletter. I will do my best, with lots of help from Kathy Lovell who does a great job with the layout. But I will also be looking for your help – this is your newsletter – what do you want to see in it? How can it serve you, the members? And finally, are you willing to contribute? I look forward to hearing from you so don't hesitate to call me at 381-5316 or e-mail me at psievers@sbcglobal.net.

## Spartan Profile: Allison Ianni

Spartan volleyball fans were thrilled to learn that Allison Ianni would be transferring to Michigan State for her senior year, giving the team an experienced setter for the spring tournaments and the 2006 season. Allison is just as excited because in many ways playing volleyball for Michigan State is something she was destined to do.

Allison's father Greg is a Michigan State alumnus who played baseball for the school and earned Academic All Big Ten recognition. He now serves as the university's Senior Associate Athletic Director for Facilities, Event and Sports Management, and his duties include overseeing all of the school's athletic facilities and developing long-range plans for improving those venues. He has supervised such projects as the installation of modular grass, new scoreboards and video-display boards at Spartan Stadium, the construction of the Breslin Center's Berkowitz Basketball Complex and the Clara Bell Smith Student-Athletic Academic Center, the replacement of the indoor field at the Duffy Daugherty Football Building, the expansions of Spartan Stadium and Munn Ice Arena, and the installation of the outdoor track and field hockey facility, which was honored as the U.S. Tennis Court and Track Builder's Association's 2003 Track Facility of the Year. He has also been involved in the successful execution of such innovative events as the BasketBowl and the Cold War. Greg was also in charge of the renovation of Jenison Field House several years ago, so he quite literally cleared the path for his daughter's career.



Her mother Jamie has done just as much to prepare the way for Allison's career. She was a letter-winner in volleyball, basketball and softball and an Academic All-American at Adrian College.

When Allison was born, Jamie was the head volleyball coach at Ohio University and she remained in that role while Allison was a toddler. Allison's only sibling, younger brother Anthony, was born when she was four and that was when the family returned to East Lansing and Greg Ianni joined the MSU athletic department.

So Allison Ianni is both literally and figuratively following in her parents' footsteps. At the same time, she's getting the chance to do what she's always dreamed of doing – well, almost. "I grew up in a gym," Allison explains, "and some of my earliest memories are of volleyball camps. There's a photo of me at age two wearing volleyball knee and elbow pads." By the time she was five, Allison knew what she wanted to be when she grew up: a ballerina, a professional basketball player and a professional volleyball player, *all at once*. There's nothing like a five-year-old's ability to dream large!

Readers may be wondering where the interest in ballet came from. After leaving coaching, Jamie Ianni taught dance and opened her own studio. So Allison literally followed in her mother's footsteps by taking lessons in ballet, tumbling, jazz and tap dancing.

She also began her athletic career, initially playing the same three sports in which her mother had excelled. She gradually began to realize that volleyball was her real passion, and began to concentrate her energies on that sport. In seventh grade she stopped playing softball. In her sophomore year of high school, having made the varsity volleyball team at Okemos High School and started to play club volleyball for the USA Michigan Runbirds, she gave up basketball as well.

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### *The Service Line*

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*All Photos: Al and Renee Schmitzer*

## Q&A with Coach George

*Q: Do you remember when you first realized that you wanted to be a coach?*

I grew up on the south side of Chicago and was always tagging after my two older brothers and playing any sport I could. In fourth grade I started to concentrate on volleyball and when I entered Mother McAuley High School, I started coaching the volleyball team at my old grade school. I loved it and I knew right away that I wanted to be a volleyball coach – I just wasn't sure what would be the best level. And after I set foot on the Illinois State campus, I realized that college was the perfect fit for me.

*Q: In 1989 you coached Texas-Arlington to the NCAA Division I Final Four. How does a commuter school with only eight players and a coach who first met her players six weeks before the season reach the NCAA Final Four?*

First of all, I was very lucky to inherit a great group of players. In those days the tournament brackets always kept schools within their region, so we knew that we'd have to beat LSU and the University of Texas to reach the Final Four. So all year we were constantly watching film of those two schools, and since we also played Texas twice the players became very familiar with Texas. The regional brackets turned out just as we expected and all of the team's hard work paid off. We rallied from two games down to beat LSU and then we upset Texas on their own home court.

*Q: Are accomplishments such as that one among your favorite memories?*

I have so many fond memories, but the ones that make me proudest come when a player or team is able to realize their full potential. Some of my favorite moments have occurred in practice when a light bulb goes on for a player and it enables her to realize her potential. It's even more exciting to see a team develop the kind of bond where they can all grow together and give of themselves as players.

When you see a whole team that trusts each other and is loyal to each other, and are committed to doing their part, that's a team that will reach its full potential. And being able to coach a team like that is something that makes you feel very proud just to be a part of.

*Q: How is next year's team progressing toward that goal?*

I'm very pleased with how they're doing. They just finished a ten-week conditioning program, and they met every challenge we set for them and did it as a team by challenging each other to get better. They even set a team contract for themselves. The team's chemistry is developing rapidly and I'm seeing leadership from so many different sources. We started team practice on March 2 and we're all very eager to see the results of their hard work.

*Q: What is the news on Katie Johnson's recovery from surgery to her left (non-hitting) elbow?*

Very encouraging. The surgery was a success and Li-li [trainer Lianna Hadden] has been monitoring her closely and is very pleased with her progress. She's been able to participate in all the conditioning drills and individual sessions, though she has to block with one arm. She's on pace to be able to play in the spring tournament and to be 100% before too long.

*Q: How exact of a science is recruiting?*

Not very. You're trying to pull together players to fill your needs but you're doing it three years before the fact, so there are so many unknowns. And so many high school players play out of position to fill their school's needs. So it's very hard to evaluate players and a lot of them surprise you.



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## Banquet Recap

The annual volleyball banquet took place on January 15 in front of a packed house of fans, players, staff and family members. The event was staged at a new location this year – the spanking-new banquet facilities at Spartan Stadium.

As usual, awards were plentiful and well-deserved. Miken Trogdon won the Kirkby Scholar Athlete Award, which has been renamed in honor of long-time generous Spartan volleyball supporters David and Mary Kirkby.



Miken Trogdon with Dave Kirkby, academic coordinator Mandy Chandler, and Mary Kirkby.

Two-time captain Megan Wallin received the Leadership Award, and Megan shared the Outstanding Offensive Player Award with Katie Johnson. Marley Bellwood took home the Coaches' Award, Mickey Davis and Brooke Langston received the Unsung Hero Award, Nicole Colaluca won the Playmaker Award, and Ashley Schatzle earned the Most Improved Player Award.

The SideOut Club Service Award went to Al and Renée Schmitzer for the extraordinary commitment they have shown to providing all of us with a photographic record of the team's accomplishments. The ceremonies culminated with the SideOut Club presenting Coach Cathy George with a check for \$7,000 – money earned by the tireless efforts of Jim Constandt, Sue Epple and all the volunteers who staff the merchandise table and sell 50/50 tickets at every match. The most eagerly awaited part of the banquet was, as always, the Senior Speeches and they did not disappoint. Marley Bellwood, Mickey Davis, Brooke Langston and Megan Wallin all reflected movingly on their five years with the Michigan State volleyball program and how proud they are to have worn the Spartan uniform. In the process they reminded all of us of the reason why MSU volleyball is so worthy of our support – because of the wonderful student-athletes who are the heart and soul of the program.

### Q&A with Coach George (cont)

*Q: One of your players at Western Michigan, Kelly Jo Kuharski, became quite famous as a result of a TV reality show called "The Bachelorette." Were you surprised?*

Not really. She always had that star quality about her. She was an incredible competitor who was feisty and fiery and got our teams to compete at a high level.

*Q: How does your coaching staff divide up responsibilities? Does each coach focus on working with the players at a particular position as in football?*

No. I try to look at each coach's strengths and think about how to get the most out of them, but all of us work with all of the players, whatever their position.



Seniors Marley Bellwood, Brooke Langston, Megan Wallin and Mickey Davis at the volleyball banquet.

## President's Message

*By Jenny Bond, SOC President*

Happy 2006! Happy spring to each of you. It has been a long time since the last message and Spartan volleyball match. Are you ready for the first spring tournament on April 8? Are you eager to see the transfer setter, Allison Ianni? John and I always enjoy seeing the development of the young players who we have rarely seen on the court.

The year-end banquet was a special one. It was the first year in several that the SOC has not taken total responsibility for it. Coach George, her secretary Nancy Lumley, volleyball assistant Z. Pope and Associate Athletic Director Shelley Appelbaum did a great job in the planning and implementation. Attendees enjoyed the new venue as it was the first opportunity for most to see the new facility at the football stadium. And what a facility! The food was good with numerous choices from a large buffet. The video of the season's highlights and the feature on the seniors could be seen by all; there are video monitors at ceiling height everywhere.

It was bittersweet to say farewell to the last of "our seven freshmen" of five years ago. Marley, Mickey, Brooke and Megan left us with class. Their speeches, thank yous, concern for each other and for their

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### Future Spartans Shine at MHSAA Championships

Three members of next year's freshman class culminated their prep volleyball careers in triumphant fashion at the MHSAA championships in Kalamazoo on March 18. Whitney Tremain and Katie Vander Meer led East Kentwood to the Class A state title, beating Fraser 3-1 to avenge a loss in the state finals two years earlier. Whitney hit a sterling .375 for the match, while Katie chipped in with 24 assists, 6 kills and 12 digs in the Falcons' six-two attack. Meanwhile Lisa Naymick led North Muskegon to the Class C state title with a dominant performance that featured 24 kills and a .541 hitting percentage. After the match, her coach was quoted in the *Battle Creek Enquirer* as saying, "I believe this was Lisa's best game of the season." Katie Vander Meer and another incoming freshman, Vanessa King, were named as finalists for the state's coveted Miss Volleyball award. The finals are scheduled to be rebroadcast on FOX Sports Detroit the second weekend in April, so make sure to check listings for a chance to watch three of our future Spartans in action.

teammates they are leaving reminded us once again how special they are. Their parents thanked SOC members profusely for our support. It was special to talk with Diana Steplyk who, as you may recall, was one of that group of seven. She completed her eligibility in 2005 as she was not redshirted her freshman year. Her parents, Tony and Judy, have continued to support the team and also attended the banquet.

Thanks to the efforts of SOC members, the club presented a check for \$7000 to Coach George. She was surprised and pleased at the amount that we had raised this year. Thanks to those of you who sold 50/50 tickets, assisted at the merchandise table, made monetary contributions with dues payment, and/or purchased shirts and other merchandise.

We owe the current SOC board members a big thank you for their efforts this year. We were fortunate to have had Peter Morris as our newsletter editor, and once again thank him for his efforts, including this final edition. Pam Sievers has agreed to step in as the editor and Kathy Lovell will continue her excellent layout job.

Check for details of the first spring tournament elsewhere in this newsletter. Get your volleyball shirts ready!

Go State!  
*Jenny Bond*



SOC President Jenny Bond accepts a clock from Coach Cathy George on behalf of the board.

## Allison Ianni (cont from page 2)

Allison explains that she was just following her heart: "I could play basketball all day, but I didn't like to practice at all. I just couldn't keep interested. But I always wanted to play volleyball."

And in particular, there was one position that fascinated her. "I never had any desire to be a hitter," Allison says, "I always wanted to be a setter." Part of it was having a cousin who was also a setter, but more than anything else was that she saw it as a challenge.

"A setter has to be a leader and an extension of the coach on the floor," she notes. "You have to be able to direct traffic, know where everyone is at all times, and also know what's going through their heads. If a teammate is struggling, you have to know whether to build their confidence back up or whether they need to be yelled at."

She believes that intangibles like these are often the difference in a match: "You can have the best players in the league, but the results won't be there if they don't like each other. They won't be able to play their best together. So a team's leaders have to make sure that a team has good chemistry and mental toughness."

Of course a setter also has a lot of other things to think about as well. Before each point Allison has to look at where the blockers are positioned and identify her most promising offensive options. As soon as the ball is served, she has all sorts of new data to consider. The middle and outside hitters are yelling to tell her where they will be and she has to distinguish their calls from the crowd noise. At the same time, she has to keep track of which options the blockers are concentrating on and make a split-second decision about where to deliver the ball.

Allison modestly downplays the challenges involved in setting. She says that, when she's focused on a match, it's not all that hard to tune out the distractions and only hear her teammates. She maintains that processing all the information and making the best choice is not that difficult either: "You just need to react; you get into trouble if you try to think and play at the same time." Of course this is easier to do when you've been around volleyball courts since the age of two.

It became clear during her high school career that the setter position was a perfect fit for her. With her mother coaching, Allison was a three-year letter-

winner and Okemos compiled a 136-33-10 record. She was an All-Capital Circuit League First Team and an All-State Second Team selection in both her junior and senior seasons, and was chosen as *Lansing State Journal* Player of the Year as a senior. And, again following her parents' example, she also excelled in the classroom, earning Academic All-State honors and being a member of the National Honor Society.

She ended her prep career as Okemos's all-time leader in service points (1,033), service aces (355), assists (3,351), and blocks (372). There can't be too many programs where the same player is the all-time leader in assists and blocks, but Allison Ianni isn't your typical player. She had been of about average height until the seventh grade, but then began to grow three inches a year until she reached her current height of 6'2". Needless to say, this makes Allison a formidable presence on the defensive end.

Typically, however, Allison's most cherished memory of her prep career was a team accomplishment. In her senior year, Okemos squared off against archrival Mason in the regional finals of the state tournament. Mason won the first game and earned a match point at 14-10 in the second game before Okemos rallied with six straight points to force a third game. The deciding game saw Mason seize a commanding 13-4 lead. Then Okemos regrouped and ran off eleven unanswered points to pull out a thrilling victory.

Many universities vied for her services, but she finally settled on the University of the Pacific in Stockton, California. While that name may not be familiar to some Midwesterners, Pacific is a longtime women's volleyball powerhouse, having been to seven Final Fours and won two national championships. (It is also the alma mater of MSU volunteer assistant Mike Gawlik, who was the starting setter on the men's varsity team.)

After two years as a backup, Allison stepped into Pacific's starting lineup last year and was chosen as an All-Big West Honorable Mention selection. But, although she had made many friends at Pacific and has some fond memories, she had also come to realize that it wasn't the right place for her. When she made the decision to transfer, Michigan State was the obvious choice, especially since she has long admired Cathy George's approach to coaching.

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## Allison Ianni (cont from page 6)

Now that she's back home, Allison is eager to make up for lost time by getting to know her new teammates. Her new teammates are just as thrilled to have her. Jessica Hohl comments, "Allison brings a new dimension to our team. She is an athletic player and her height will be an asset. She is also always upbeat and never down. I am glad to have her on our team!"

Allison is especially looking forward to meeting the six freshmen who will be joining the team in the fall. As a freshman at Pacific, Jennifer Joines – who now plays for the National Team – took Allison under her wing and made the transition to college much easier. She hopes to return the favor because she knows first-hand the importance of getting everyone to "buy into the system and feel part of the team" as quickly as possible.

Mentoring is a natural role for Allison, who was recently accepted to Michigan State's School of Education. She's planning a career as an elementary school teacher, most likely second or third grade. It's a safe bet that coaching volleyball at some level will fit into the mix as well.

But first Allison Ianni is intent on making the most of her senior year. It's a little hard for her to believe that by this time next year her college career will be over. "It has gone by really fast," she exclaims.

Like any experience that seems to go by too quickly, she has greatly enjoyed the opportunity to be a student-athlete. Asked how her college years would have been different without sport, Allison has a hard time imagining what they would have been like. "I definitely don't feel like I've missed out on anything," she says. "I feel that I've been more fortunate because being part of a close group means that you always have people you can turn to when you need to."

The answer is typical of Allison's positive outlook. While varsity athletics put tremendous time constraints on student-athletes, she sees that as a benefit because it makes it necessary to learn time management. "If not for volleyball," she reflects, "I'd have a lot of extra time but I'm not sure what I'd do with it." Then she adds with a laugh, "I'd probably be looking around for something to do."

She also believes that sports have helped her to learn many valuable life lessons. After a tough loss in high school her father gave her some valuable advice by telling her never to be afraid to fail because if you are, you will play not to lose. The words stuck with Allison and she has never forgotten them.

Summing it up, she says thoughtfully, "Sports bring out your true colors. How you handle adversity shows you who you are and what you're about." As a result, she looks at her teammates and sees mental toughness: "You can throw anything at them, and they'll respond well."

She's already begun to feel comfortable with those new teammates and has joined them on a couple of outreach programs at local schools to talk about the importance of staying in school and of keeping healthy and fit, while also giving the kids some volleyball tips. One of the stops was at Kinawa Middle School in Okemos, where many of the youngsters remembered Allison having coached them back in fourth grade. They were eager to show her how much they had progressed and she was just as thrilled to see their new skills.

For Allison Ianni, it was another reminder that there really is no place like home.

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## Ron Arenz's New Job



Assistant coach Ron Arenz recently left Michigan State to become the head coach at the University of West Alabama. It's a perfect fit for Ron because his fiancée Noelle Wiley has accepted a teaching position in Alabama. A thorough search for a new assistant coach has already started.

## SPRING TOURNAMENT SCHEDULE

### HOME TOURNAMENT

**Saturday April 8**

**Jenison Fieldhouse**

10 am MSU v. Northwood  
11 am Northwood v. Ferris  
Noon MSU v. Ferris  
1 pm MSU v. Northwood  
2 pm Northwood v. Ferris  
3 pm MSU v. Ferris  
**(no charge)**

Saturday April 15

Tournament at Kent State

Saturday April 22

Tournament at the Great Lakes Center,  
Aurora, Illinois



The tentative fall schedule can be seen  
at the SideOut Club website: [http://  
www.msusideout.org/](http://www.msusideout.org/).



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