

# THE SERVICE LINE

MSU VOLLEYBALL @MICHSTVB



Volume XXI, Issue 7

March 18th, 2016

Special thank you to Peter Morris for article submissions.

## Welcome, J.T. Wenger!

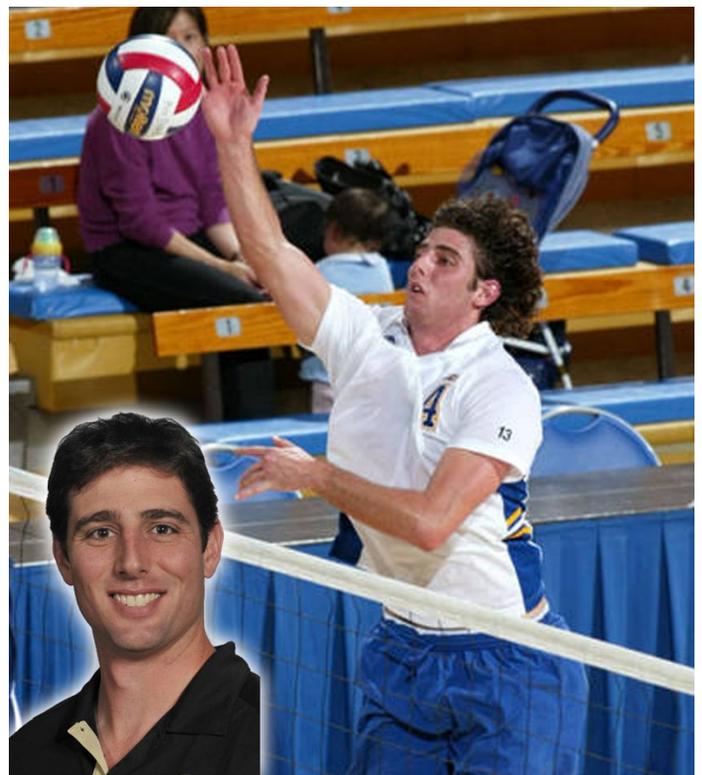
It took less than three weeks for Cathy George to fill the hole in her staff left by Mike Gawlik's departure by hiring J.T. Wenger. J.T. comes to East Lansing after four years of coaching at the women's program at the University of Colorado, where he earned a promotion to Associate Head Coach, and six years of coaching for the men's program at UCLA, his alma mater. He has also coached extensively with USA Volleyball, leading teams in tournaments in such far-flung locales as India, Japan, and China. Nevertheless, coaching in the Big Ten will be a homecoming of sorts for the Wengers; J.T. grew up in Highland Park, Illinois, about fifteen miles north of the campus of Northwestern University, while his wife Marissa is a Wisconsin native who graduated from the University of Wisconsin.

After earning a degree in political science from UCLA in 2004 with an emphasis in international relations, J.T. played professionally in Puerto Rico and then returned to the Chicago area, where he worked with his father in commodity trading. But the passion for volleyball remained strong, and before long he realized that the same skills that he had learned in his major would translate into coaching. So when he was offered the chance to coach at his alma mater under the legendary Al Scates - winner of an extraordinary nineteen NCAA National Championships in a fifty-year career - he jumped at the opportunity.

"Al Scates was at the forefront of bringing statistical analysis to volleyball," J.T. explains. "Even after fifty years of doing things, he was always looking for ways to improve and ways to reduce the chance for human error. The biggest things I learned from him were the importance of putting athletes in the best situations to succeed and supporting competition in the gym so that the players can be as good as they can be."

Accordingly, he was unfazed when he made the switch from coaching men's volleyball to coaching the women's game. While there's a lot of discussion about how strategies differ, in the end, he says, the aim is still to terminate when on offense and to keep the ball alive when on defense. "I think that there is an opportunity to be a part of something special at MSU," he adds, "and I am eager to get started."

In their spare time, J.T. and Marissa enjoy watching movies and a variety of outdoor activities. Such time is in short supply right now, however, as they are the proud parents of two little ones: a daughter, Vivienne, and a son, Reid.





# The BIG Conference: An In-Depth Look

Since most of the matches that we get to watch Michigan State play at Jenison Fieldhouse are against Big Ten rivals, it is easy to take for granted just how strong of a volleyball conference the Big Ten has become. So this will be the first in a series of articles that will look at the conference's strength from a number of different angles.

Of course, the most convenient measuring stick to use is the NCAA Tournament and it tells quite a story. In the first fourteen years of the NCAA Division I Women's Volleyball Championship, from 1981 to 1994, teams from California or Hawai'i won thirteen championships, with the University of Texas being the lone exception. The runner-up also hailed from either California or Hawai'i in all but three years, with only Nebraska (twice) and Penn State (once) breaking through. It was no wonder that West Coasters thought of volleyball as their game. Things started to change when Michigan State made its first Final Four appearance in 1995 in

what turned out to be an all-Big Eight final between Nebraska and Texas. Over the next decade (1996-2005), Big Ten teams reached the championship game half the time but the trophy usually stayed on the west coast. Penn State was the only Big Ten team to win a title during those years, but the Nittany Lions also suffered back-to-back heartbreaking five-set losses in 1997 (to Kerri Walsh and Stanford) and 1998 (to Misty May and Long Beach State).

Everything has changed in the last ten years, however, with teams currently in the Big Ten having claimed eight of those ten championships. Nebraska's 2006 title was earned before the Cornhuskers joined the Big Ten, but even if we don't count that championship, there is no question that there has been a major shift in the balance of power. And while those championships have been divided among just two schools, the Big Ten is much deeper than just two schools: Illinois, Michigan, Michigan State, Minnesota, Ohio State, and Wisconsin have all made trips to

the Final Four. In a future article, we will look more closely at the results of recent tournaments for confirmation.

Instead, let's close this piece with the truism that great teams need great coaches. Russ Rose of Penn State and John Cook of Nebraska have both won multiple National Championships, but once again that tells only part of the story. Hugh McCutcheon has already added to his Olympic legacy by taking Minnesota to last year's Final Four, while Kevin Hambly (Illinois), Mark Rosen (Michigan), and Kelly Sheffield (Wisconsin) have all led their current school to a Final Four. In addition, one other current Big Ten coach has reached that pinnacle: Cathy George, who led Texas-Arlington to the 1989 Final Four! And, just when you think the conference couldn't get any more difficult, the newest Big Ten coach is Shane Davis of Northwestern, who has led Loyola-Chicago to back-to-back NCAA Men's National Collegiate Volleyball Championships!

**HELP SPREAD THE WORD!**

Summer camp registration is open. We have a camp for every age and skill level as well as half day and overnight camps. Check us out!

**MICHIGAN STATE  
SPORTS CAMP**

# Volleyball

## 2016 DATES

**July 9**

*College Prep Camp  
MSU Kids Camp*

**July 11**

*Serving & Passing Camp  
Defense Camp*

**July 12**

*Attacking Camp  
Blocking Camp*

**July 13**

*Setting Camp  
Middle School General Skills Camp*

**July 14-16**

*All Skills Overnight Camp*

**July 18-20**

*Overnight/Day Competitive Team Camp  
Shootout Team Day Camp*

## Girl's Resident and Commuter Camps

### Entering Grades 1-12

For more information about the coaches and our program visit [www.msuspartans.com](http://www.msuspartans.com) or twitter @MICHSTVB.

For any Volleyball related questions call our office at 517-353-1756.

\*Must be 12 years old to spend the night

*This Summer We Train Like Spartans!*

To register online go to: [www.sportscamps.msu.edu](http://www.sportscamps.msu.edu)

**MICHIGAN STATE  
VOLLEYBALL**