This week the usual excitement of the start of the Big Ten season will be accompanied by the renewal of one of the greatest rivalries in all of college sports – Michigan State versus Michigan on Wednesday the 21st for state bragging rights. The last time these two schools hooked up produced an all-time classic, with Katie Johnson’s kill at 16-15 in the fifth set giving the Spartans the dramatic victory after both sides had failed to capitalize on previous match points. You can bet that the Wolverines will be itching for revenge, while the Spartans will be just as motivated to reclaim the State Pride Flag.

Adding to the atmosphere will be the season’s first appearance of the Spartan Brass, under the leadership of Spartan Marching Band Director John T. Madden. The pep band will be appearing at as many Big Ten volleyball matches as their busy schedule allows, and they will be a great addition. Make sure to thank a member of the pep band or one of our hard-working cheerleaders for all their contributions to the aura of Jenison Field House.

Spartan fans will have two added incentives to arrive early for the Michigan match. The first is that t-shirts will be handed out to the first 500 fans through the door. The second is the season’s second “Chalk Talk” with Head Coach Cathy George, which will be held in Room 209 of Jenison from about 6:10 to 6:25. At these events, which are exclusively for SideOut Club members, Coach George will provide fans with the inside scoop on what to look for in that evening’s game. (Future Chalk Talks will be held on October 7, October 21 and November 25.)

But really – does anybody need any added incentive to attend a Michigan-Michigan State volleyball match?

Wow! How did you like the great start for the 2005 season? It was good to see many of you at the Kent State match and the MSU Invitational Tournament. We had a large crowd at the Coach’s Luncheon on August 27, where attendees greatly enjoyed the opportunity to hear Cathy, Russ and Ron speak. It was also informative to attend the “Chalk Talk” before the Friday evening match during the tournament. Future “Chalk Talks” will be held on September 21, October 7, October 21 and November 25, starting at 6:10 p.m. There will be signs leading you to Room 209 of Jenison or one can take the elevator. I think you will find Coach George’s comments on strategy and how the team will approach its opponents enlightening. All of us can learn more about volleyball regardless of how long we have been fans.

It was a great honor to present the trophies at the end of the tournament after the MSU women played so well. Katie Johnson, who is called KJ by the team and “Thumper” by my husband (for obvious reasons), was definitely the MVP. The MSU representatives on the All-Tournament Team were also most worthy. Mickey Davis got the job done in a “quiet and efficient manner,” as one fan observed. And aren’t we glad that “Cola” transferred from St. John’s University!

I sent an e-mail to the entire team on behalf of the SOC to congratulate them on their performance, and especially the teamwork we observed. I also told them that fans appreciated their coming into the stands after the match and their celebration dance when they won the tournament. One gets the idea that Jenison could really “rock” this season.

Volunteers are needed for 50-50 sales, merchandise sales and other club activities. Check at the SOC merchandise table to see how you can help. If you indicated on your membership form that you would be willing to help, stop by the merchandise table to sign up for a specific job and times to work.
Meet the New Faces: Melany Rarey

Freshman Melany Rarey grew up in Hartford City, Indiana, a small town about fifty miles south of Fort Wayne. Sports have been a big part of her life as long as she can remember, whether it was competing at softball, basketball, volleyball and track or just playing in the yard with her sister and two brothers. As the youngest child, she had to wait for her turn in the spotlight as her older siblings went on to play sports in high school and two of them at the college level. Melany bided her time by competing for the Munciana Volleyball Club from the age of 11, and when she entered high school she was more than ready!

At Blackford High School, she was a three-sport varsity athlete. In track, Melany was a member of the all-conference squad all four years and set two school records. Volleyball was her main focus, and she had the additional pleasure of having her mother Sherry as an assistant coach. Playing left outside hitter and middle back, Mel was a member of the all-conference volleyball squad in all four years and garnered all-state accolades during her senior season. In the process, she rewrote the school record book by establishing sixteen individual records, including new career marks in attacks (3,143), kills (1,432), digs (1,289), serves (1,286), aces (201) and wins (104).

For her first three years she also competed in basketball, but she switched to swimming as a senior because she felt it would reduce the wear and tear on her body. At first she struggled with the new sport, which was a frustrating experience for someone who was used to excelling at athletics. But that just made her more determined to succeed and by the end of the season she had helped to establish yet another new school record in the 200 medley.

Yet Melany is very aware that success at the prep level doesn’t always translate to college, especially in a conference as competitive as the Big Ten. She explains, “The game itself is not that different in college but what’s different is that everyone is really good.” That makes for a simple but profound change in how the game is played. In a high school match, everyone in the gym often knows where the set is going and defenders can afford to guess. But at the collegiate level, teams always have more than one viable option, which means that defenders must stay at their base and pay more attention to details such as reading the hitter and the blocker.

In her first month on campus, Melany has had to make a wide range of adjustments. Perhaps the biggest is adapting to the size of the Michigan State campus and to a student body many times larger than the entire population of her hometown. She reports that after growing up in a small town, it is quite a transition to look at a sea of faces and not know anybody. And she adds with a laugh that she was completely baffled the first time somebody held up their hand to show her where they were from!

Having to earn playing time is another big adjustment, but she is philosophical about that. “I never sat on the bench in high school,” she remarks, “so it’s tough to have to stay on the sidelines but I understand. I just remind myself that I’m just a freshman and have to wait my turn. So I just try to work that much harder so that I’m ready when my time comes.”

Since Melany is only 5’7” the natural assumption of many onlookers is that she is and always will be a defensive specialist. Yet in practice she routinely exhibits a vertical leap – what the players call “serious hops” – that enables her to attack with confidence against much taller defenders. When asked about this, she admits with a shy grin that she takes satisfaction in knowing that “I’ve got something people don’t know about.” While for now her focus is on being a defensive specialist, she says that she would love to eventually get left side swings.

Cathy George comments, “Mel is an outstanding athlete and a quick learner. We believe she has a great future. Her quickness is tremendous and we will be able to capitalize on that in our system as time goes on. Whenever we call on her, we know she’ll be ready.”

Melany knows that balancing academics with the demands of the Big Ten volleyball schedule will be another big adjustment for her, especially since she is a pre-med major who intends to become an orthopedic surgeon. She says that she is very excited about being out on her own for the first time and making decisions for herself but is quick to emphasize that she is very conscious that that is a responsibility that she cannot afford to take lightly.
On first meeting Nicole Colaluca, it becomes immediately apparent that she is a bubbly, outgoing young woman with an engaging personality and an infectious smile. After digging a little deeper, one finds that she also possesses a reservoir of strength and determination that has enabled her to succeed in a sport that is dominated by much taller players.

“Cola” is a junior transfer from St. John’s University who hails from Naperville, Illinois, the same Chicago suburb that produced Spartan greats Christie Landry and Jenna Wrobel. Her parents divorced when she was young and she was raised by her mother Lynn, whom Nicole describes as “both a mother and a best friend.” Her father remarried, so her family also includes a half-brother and -sister.

As a youngster, she tried her hand at just about every imaginable activity, including ballet and band. She soon recognized that sports were her true passion, to such an extent that she now says, “I can’t even imagine what my life would be like without sports!” She played softball, soccer, tennis and badminton, but when she discovered volleyball she knew that it was the sport for her. In sixth grade she first tried out for Chicago’s legendary Sports Performance Volleyball Club. She was not selected but that only made Nicole more determined to work that much harder to improve her game.

She again tried out for Sports Performance in grade seven and grade eight, but each time failed to make the cut. By this time her mother decided to help out and organized a new club, the North Stars, for which Nicole played that year. In grade nine, she again went through tryouts for Sports Performance but with the same disheartening result. That year she played for Club Elite, where she met her best friend, Meg Eckert, who now plays for North Carolina.

The following year, she yet again tried out for Sports Performance and this time she finally had the thrill of hearing her name called. Nicole recalls that she was so happy she wanted to cry and that she could hardly wait for the end of practice to call her mother and all her friends to tell them the news. But then, after trying for so many years to make the club, a new obstacle emerged to test her resiliency. Up until this point, Nicole had been of above average height for her age and had been an outside hitter. However, she had already reached her current height of 5’7” and stopped growing, so within a year the coaches asked her to move to the libero position.

Nicole threw herself into her new position and soon found it an ideal fit. She worked her way up the ranks at Sports Performance, leading the club’s 18-1 squad to a national championship at the Junior Olympics in 2003. She also starred at Naperville Central High School, being a two-time selection for all-conference and all-conference academic honors and earning conference Most Valuable Player honors as a senior.

 Asked what makes her so well suited to playing libero, Nicole modestly says, “Because I can’t jump.” But when pressed, she says that she loves the challenge of trying to anticipate what the attacker has in mind. Her favorite t.v. show is CSI and she uses a similar attention to detail when she scrutinizes the attacker’s body movements and arm movements for clues. She explains that even when an attacker tries to disguise her shot, their eyes will still give them away: “most attackers look at a spot before they hit and they’ll always at least glance at where they are going.” In addition, Nicole’s experience as an attacker provides her with critical insight: “My mentality is – I used to do that and know what you’re thinking.”

She also finds her position to be a perfect fit for her outgoing personality. While an attacker gets to take out her aggression on the ball, a defensive specialist needs to supply her own energy. That is something that comes naturally to Nicole, but she’s not above seeking outside help. Her musical tastes run the gamut from r&b to hard rock to Enya, but she always prepares for a match by listening to rap because the beat gets her juices flowing. She says that at Sports Performance the background music always had the fastest beat during defensive drills and that her MSU teammates do something similar: “we’ll just jump around and dance around to get ready for drills. It might not look very good but it gets us in rhythm.”

Her positive attitude and competitive nature are also assets for playing a position where bouncing back up off the floor is part of the job description. “I’ve had my share of facialcs,” Nicole acknowledged, “but it’s just one point.” And, after all, when it took so many years of persevering to make Sports Performance, why would she get down over one point?—cont on p. 5
During her Michigan State career, fifth-year “super senior” Brooke Langston has played right side, middle blocker and left side hitter. For some players, being moved around so much might be unsettling. But to Brooke the changes of scenery just make her feel at home.

“Let’s see,” she muses when asked where she grew up. “I was born in Ohio and went to kindergarten in Florida. Wait, I left out a couple of years in Mexico. Then there was Singapore – nope that was second grade. Australia was first grade and then Singapore. Then it was Mexico again from 3 to 5 and Memphis from 6 through high school.”

When Brooke went off to Michigan State, her parents Greg and Beth slipped off to Maine for a year before returning to Tennessee.

Despite the frequent moves, or perhaps because of them, Brooke says that she and her older brother Brad had a fairytale childhood in which the extraordinary seemed possible. With a child’s easy familiarity, she became accustomed to kangaroos and twenty-eight-hour plane rides, while picking up Spanish and even an Australian accent when they were needed. Her best friend was often “anyone who spoke English” but that made her all the closer to her brother and her parents and their close-knit relationship provided all the stability that she needed. She comments that she is very grateful to her family “for being supportive whatever mood I was in and always bringing humor and stability to my life. I give them all the credit for it though they probably won’t want to take the credit.”

This in turn gave Brooke a security that made her feel comfortable in her surroundings – no matter how often they changed – and enabled her to dream big dreams. Her first ambition was to become a marine biologist, which lasted until she was 12 and discovered that she was afraid of waves. But by then she had discovered that she had a talent for sports and, as she matter-of-factly puts it, “since that was my gift, I should probably use it.”

As a youngster, she had played a number of sports, with equestrian being her favorite. She explains that she loved the thrill of getting used to working with a new horse and the special relationship that resulted. But by the seventh grade she was beginning to become disillusioned about competing in a sport in which the size of one’s pocketbook often meant more than the size of one’s heart. She also found the sport could be lonely and began to long for the camaraderie and unity of a team sport. Coincidentally, she started a growth spurt that same year and the result was an outstanding high school career in track and field and volleyball.

Brooke won six state championships in track and field, including three in the high jump, two in the pentathlon and one in the 4x200 relay. She led her small private school, Evangelical Christian, to state runner-up finish and was named first-team Tennessee all-state in 2000. All that and she graduated in three years while maintaining a 4.2 grade point average on a 4.0 scale!

When Brooke arrived at Michigan State, her unique background made it relatively easy for her to adapt to the changes that most freshmen find stressful. Yet she found being away from her family for the first time to be harder than she expected. Being on her own forced her to reevaluate many of her beliefs and she realized that many of her values were ones that she had inherited from her parents without really understanding them. This led to a lot of soul-searching, which was intensified by the pressures of Big Ten volleyball and the disappointment of a series of injuries. Yet she feels now that the obstacles have been a blessing in disguise because they have forced her to “realize that it’s not all about me – it’s about how I use my gifts and my opportunities.” And, after reexamining many of her family’s beliefs she came back to accepting a very similar set of values.

She explains, for example, that her Christian faith used to be something she took for granted but that now “I believe because I want to rather than being told to.” The result is that all of her values mean much more to her now because they are her own: “my experiences have taught me who I am and set me up for the life I want to lead and what I want to stand for.” — cont on page 7

Photos on this page: Al and Renee Schmitzer
Nicole started her college career at St. John’s University in the Big East. As a freshman, she won the starting libero job and posted 474 digs, the third-highest single-season total in school history. She surpassed that as a sophomore, setting a new school record for digs with 592. While she loved New York City and her teammates, she realized at that point that it was time for a change. In January she transferred to Michigan State, which gave her the opportunity to play in spring tournaments. She will be eligible to play in the fall and has two years of eligibility remaining.

Her friendly nature has allowed her to blend in smoothly in her new surroundings. She loves having practices that are both structured and fast-moving, and appreciates Cathy George’s ability to strike a similar balance between driving players to improve and being sympathetic when they struggle. She is just as fond of her new teammates, whom she describes as “an amazing bunch of personalities, who are both fun to be with and passionate about succeeding.”

She has stepped smoothly into the starting lineup and was named to the All-Tournament team at the Spartan Invitational. Cathy George observes that, “Cola is a steadying force as the backbone of the team’s defense. Her teammates feed off her ability to remain relaxed and keep steady throughout. She is very competitive, and has great focus and intensity.”

Nicole is excited about the Big Ten season and especially to facing Northwestern, because her cousin Christie Gardner plays for the Wildcats. As a player, she strives to get better every game and to lower her error percentage. She says that she knows she has succeeded when she can see the frustration on the face of an opposing hitter. As a team, she says that being picked ninth in the Big Ten preseason poll “has made the team come together even more. Our goal is to prove that we’re not what everyone thinks we are.”

Nicole recently changed her major from history to communications, with a minor in public relations. She intends to return to the Chicago area, where she would ideally like to work behind the scenes for a media company such as NBC and eventually start her own public relations firm. Asked where she sees herself in ten years, Nicole says that she wants to be “settled and successful” but the definition that she provides of those terms is not the conventional one: “that would mean not having forgotten any of my friends or someone I cared for, having a job that I love, that’s stable, having it for ten years and still having fun doing it.” If she has those things, she explains, the more traditional manifestations of success are sure to follow. When Nicole speaks about success, her words carry an unmistakable ring of authority because they come from someone who understands the sacrifices that success requires.

MSU Composite Schedule

We’ve all experienced the disappointment of rushing to make the start of a volleyball match only to find that there is another event on campus and that parking spots are difficult to find. The athletic department’s website offers a helpful composite schedule for all of MSU’s varsity teams at this website:

http://msuspartans.collegesports.com/calendar/events/

For most of us, the benefit of this website is that it makes it possible to determine at a glance whether there is likely to be a parking crunch. Or, if you are like Lyle Montgomery, you can use the site to try to cheer on every single Spartan team. It is also a good idea to check the Breslin Center calendar for conflicts:

http://www.breslincenter.com/eventscalendar.asp

Unfortunately this calendar tends to be out of date. Keep in mind, however, that there is a Jay Leno show at Breslin on Saturday, October 8, the same night that the Spartans will be hosting Illinois.
Spartan Invitational Recap

Labor Day weekend brought a notable triumph for the Spartan volleyball team, as they captured the Spartan Invitational with convincing 3-0 wins over Wichita State, South Florida and Ball State. While these schools may not be household names, each is a perennial contender in its conference. Particularly satisfying was the win over Wichita State, which posted a 25-6 mark in 2004 and received 41 votes in the American Volleyball Coaches Association’s preseason poll.

The Spartans were led by tournament MVP Katie Johnson, who contributed an amazing 67 kills in the three matches. Her 27 kills against Wichita State made her only the third player in school history to average nine kills a game throughout a match, joining Jenna Wrobel (who did it four times) and Kim Schram. As Cathy George explained at her Chalk Talk, Katie also made a big contribution at the defensive end, with her three solo blocks and three more by fellow left-side hitter Ashley Schatzle taking Wichita State completely out of its offensive game plan.

Katie was joined on the all-tournament team by setter Mickey Davis, who has made the transition to the starting setter role look effortless, and libero Nicole Colaluca, who provided spectacular coverage of the backcourt. But their standout performances were just part of a great team effort, with contributions in the back court from Marley and Tracy Bellwood and Miken Trogdon, and in the front court from Schatzle, Megan Wallin (who hit a sizzling .684 against South Florida), Brooke Langston and blocking stalwart Jessica Hohl.

An added bonus was the opportunity to see the Spartan debuts of freshman Heather McDaniel and junior Caroline Belich. Caroline earned a rousing ovation when she entered the match against Ball State, which was a fitting recognition of a player who has patiently contributed in every way except during matches.

Melany Rarey—cont from page 2

As if all these adjustments aren’t enough to deal with, Melany’s brother Zach was deployed to Iraq in late August for a stay of at least seven months. She observes that her faith has made it easier to deal with his deployment and that she has been comforted by several of her new teammates volunteering to join her in praying for his safety.

The one adjustment that hasn’t been difficult has been getting to know her teammates and coaches. She credits the bond that they immediately made with preventing all of the other transitions from becoming overwhelming. She says that after a day of meeting new people it lifts her spirits to come to practice and be around friendly and familiar faces again. It has been especially helpful that her “big sister” on the team, Mickey Davis, had coached Mel during camps and they now lift together in the weight room. Having a generous cell phone plan has also helped, as she makes a point of talking to her family and at least two friends every day.

Melany describes herself as easygoing off the court but much more serious on the volleyball court because she strives to remain focused and prepared for anything that might happen. At the end of a match, she thinks not about the things that she did well but about what she needs to do to improve. That’s one of the reasons why she wanted to play for Cathy George, whom Melany says “is always trying to tell me how to do something better but in an encouraging way, not a negative way.”

It is that serious approach – along with her serious hops – that make Melany Rarey an important part of the Spartans’ future.
Brooke Langston—cont from p. 4

That perspective enables Brooke to always keep in mind “how lucky I am to be selected out of 44,000 people on campus to do something I love to do.” She says that nothing reminds her of that reality more vividly than the little kids who come to games and are impressed by “everything that you do” and “light up when you talk to them.” She confides that these youngsters “think that we’re doing something for them but actually it does more for us than for them.”

Her personal growth has enabled Brooke to emerge as one of the rocks of the program, a quality that enables her teammates to lean on her. Marley Bellwood explains, “Brooke is best described as a truly passionate person who puts her all into everything she does. She is a great friend and teammate who is consistently giving of herself to better those around her. She is also a major fashionista who loves fabulous things and can truly appreciate originality.”

As she begins her final season, Brooke is determined to make the most of her last opportunity to wear the Green and White both on and off the court. When she was a freshman, a number of players, including Kyla Smith and Angela Morley, took her under their wings and helped Brooke adjust to her new surroundings. That favor is one that she remains grateful for and intends to pass on to her younger teammates. Her “little sister” this year is Heather McDaniel and the pair have already formed a special bond. She also recognizes how important it is for the veteran players to be there for all of the freshmen, “not so much to answer questions that could throw them off track and how to recognize the signs.”

While this season will undoubtedly add many memories to Brooke Langston’s treasure trove, she reports that she already has enough to last a lifetime. Some are triumphs, including last year’s spine-tingling victory over Michigan and the 2002 trip to the Sweet Sixteen. Others are light-hearted, such as Jessica Hohl’s ability to keep everyone loose and the time when Brooke toppled an entire row of chairs during the warm-ups to an NCAA tournament game at Wisconsin. Still others are poignant, such as the pride of seeing the sense of trust that is built when one player puts in extra time to try to pick up a struggling teammate. But all of them will be remembered fondly and they enable Brooke, when asked if she would do it all again, to declare with conviction: “Of course I would!”

Brooke has been a fixture on the Dean’s list throughout her career and has been a three-time Academic All-Big Ten selection. She has already completed her course work for a Bachelor’s degree in Apparel and Textile Design and needs only a few independent study credits to graduate in December. After that, she and Megan Wallin intend to team up and play on the professional beach volleyball circuit. Eventually, her plans are for a career in fashion journalism or fashion public relations, but she is also thinking about getting a personal trainer’s license.

Based on her track record, it would be foolish to try to predict where Brooke will end up. What is beyond dispute is that wherever she goes, she will make full use of her gifts and her opportunities.

President’s Message – cont from p. 1

Definitely plan to attend the SOC annual meeting following the Michigan game on September 21. We need you there! Meet in the section of the bleachers nearest the food sales stand. The meeting usually lasts about 30-40 minutes. I do not know yet if Coach George will join us at some time during the session.

Thanks to the following for yeoman efforts on behalf of the club and program in this new season:

Coach George wanted all SOC members to have a shirt and purchased the black shirts that many of you have already picked up from the merchandise table.

Shirley Garrity worked very hard to round up enough Court Crew members for the tournament, a difficult task on a holiday weekend. She and Chuck Riley were pressed into serving as court crew during some of the day matches.

Jim Constandt worked his usual magic in setting up the merchandise and taking charge of the sales table for three straight nights. Stu Pater- son worked Friday; Dennis Eagle helped Saturday night.

Jim Ellis has once again taken the lead in setting up the courtside seats and Young Spartan drawings. As Treasurer, he works with John Bond, who manages the club database, mailing labels, etc., to keep the membership and financial records current.

Chuck Riley and Pam Sievers represented the SOC and MSU well as they welcomed the visiting teams and assisted them during their stay in the area. When I asked the Wichita State coach at the end of the tournament if there was anything else we could have done for him, he said the tournament ran smoothly and the SOC representative was very helpful.

Chris Wolf had his usual informative display board at the Coach’s Luncheon and the Kent State match. Several people missed this display at the tournament and asked me about it. Chris has assured us that he will have the display available the remainder of the season. He is also doing an outstanding job with the club website. Be sure to check it out at www.msusideout.org.

Peter Morris and Kathy Lovell did a great job with the August newsletter. The entire volleyball staff from the head coach to the managers have been helpful as we have needed to make some adjustments in the club’s procedures and activities with the changes in the Jenison layout, etc. Susan Apple and Jim Ellis have the 50-50 license and tickets in place for the first drawing on September 21 with the start of the Big Ten season.

I hope to see you at the Annual Meeting after the Michigan game. Participate!

Jenny Bond

Be an Advocate – Contact the Lansing State Journal

By Jenny Bond

Are you concerned with the paucity of coverage of MSU volleyball in the Lansing State Journal this season? There has been more about Lansing Community College volleyball than about our Spartans. Something is wrong with this picture!

If you are a subscriber or purchaser of the State Journal, let the editors know you want to read more about MSU volleyball and expect to see the matches listed with the other sports. The September 9 issue contains a brief update on the team’s activities; we want these efforts to continue. Brent Neal is Sports Editor (sports@lsj.com). You may also e-mail opinions@lsj.com or send a letter to Letters to the Editor, Lansing State Journal, 120 E. Lee- nawee Street, Lansing, MI 48919.
# FALL BIG TEN SCHEDULE

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# Non-Conference Schedule

- **Sat. 8/20—Alumni game—7:00pm—home**
- **Sat. 8/27—Kent State—7:00pm—home**
- **9/1-9/3 MSU Invitational—home**
  - 9/1 MSU vs Wichita State—7:00pm
  - 9/2 S. Florida vs Ball State—11:00am
  - 9/2 Ball State vs Wichita State—4:30pm
  - 9/3 MSU vs S. Florida—7:00pm
  - 9/3 Wichita State vs S. Florida—4:30pm
  - 9/3 MSU vs Ball State—7:00pm
- **9/9-9/10 @ University of Kansas Tournament**
- **9/16-9/17 @ University of Miami (Florida) Orange and Green Challenge**
- **NCAA tournament starts Dec. 1**

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