

HIGH SCHOOL BOYS' VOLLEYBALL A GROWING TREND AROUND THE NATION

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"It is a common belief that state-sanctioned boys' volleyball is coming to most of the U.S. high schools. The debate has narrowed down to when and *when*." These were the opening remarks by Paul Hastings, active proponent to boys' volleyball in Colorado, as he spoke to members of the Colorado High School Activity Association, governing body that regulates sports activities for Colorado's 280 high schools. Hastings along with Mike Gaughan and John Kurach, all parents of boys that want to play high school volleyball, volunteer to help get boys' volleyball sanctioned as a high school sport in Colorado.

Armed with pages of his speech and reference notes from the National Federation of State High School Associations, Hastings understands this is just the beginning; that this governing body will need to hear more, much more before they will be persuaded. "I'm trying to lay the groundwork," said Hastings, "it's going to be a long row to hoe, but someone needs to do it." Hastings feels he's "in" for the duration until the goal is accomplished.

The story illustrated the challenges that boys' volleyball faces, what parents and athletes must do to get boys' volleyball into their high schools. The CHSAA response typified high school districts around the country. Though many school districts now offer boys' volleyball as part the athletics program and the number of high schools offering the sport continue to grow steadily, the boys still have a long way to go.

When compared nationally with the number of girls participating in high school volleyball, the boys' figures are low. According to the National Federation of State High School Associations, which keeps statistics on the sports offered by the high schools around the country, the total number of high schools offering boys' volleyball as a sport last year rose to 1380 schools, up 99 schools from the previous year. Of these 1380 school teams, 31,523 boys participated. On the other side of gender, 12,537 high schools fielded girls' volleyball teams that allowed 340,176 girls access to volleyball. Girls' high school volleyball covers the courts in all 50 states while boys' volleyball is active in only 19 states with many states showing only a few teams.

When compared with the boys, girls' volleyball history would appear to run deeper, despite the fact that boys' volleyball has been around since the 1930's. According to Susan True, Assistant Director of the NFSHA, the earliest record of boys' volleyball comes from Pennsylvania which has been holding and recording state championships since 1932. A date that surprised even True. "I couldn't believe it," said True researching volleyball history for volleyball bicentennial, "I had to call and verify the information myself."

The earliest "official" figures for boys' volleyball collected by the NFSHSA began in the late 60's. They show over 3,500 schools reporting boys' volleyball teams with 63,144 boys participating, but no girls participation. Only after Title IX passed in 1972, did girls' volleyball figures begin to grow. The Federal Title IX legislation passed in 1972 mandated equal school sports time to both male and female athletes. It basically stated that if a school has at least a 40% female population, then the school must create an athletic program that provides for an equal number of boys and girls, men and women, in the school's sports.

In high schools, football provides a sports outlet for up to 80 boys. For schools to stay within the federal guidelines, they must provide an equal number of girls access to sports programs. Girls' volleyball provides such an opportunity to help offset football. Title IX proved to be a boon for volleyball and women. Within six years of its passage, the number of girls' high school teams around the country escalated to almost 12,000 teams and involved over 326,000 girls according to the NFSHSA records.

Though Title IX boosted the sport of volleyball overall, the boys' volleyball programs got hammered. The number of boys' volleyball teams reported by the high schools dropped sharply from the 3,500 teams to 1,104 teams and from 63,144 to 27,704 boys playing volleyball. For the next ten years, high school boys' volleyball teams would continue to decline to a low of less than 400 teams reported around the country and only 7,059 boys participating. "It's been tough on boys' volleyball," said True when comparing the two. "It gets to be a money issue."

Every time Mike Fleming, a physical education teacher in the Spokane, Washington and an advocate for boys' volleyball in the high schools, hears lack of money as the reason for not adding boys' volleyball, he disagrees.

Fleming in his article, "Rationale and Strategies for Implementation of Scholastic Boys' Volleyball," published in USA Volleyball's IMPACT Manual wrote:

"Schools today, just like businesses and government, find themselves beset by financial and administrative pressures and constraints that make it seem hard to just keep the offerings (sports programs) they have, let alone consider adding new programs.

Philosophically however, public institutions of learning by their very nature ought to be the places that seek to offer all their young people the most varied and complete opportunities which they can provide. That as we well know is simple not how reality works. . . . Unfortunate. Remember all those years and years that schools had only football, basketball, track and baseball . . . and even those were only for boys?

Did school administrators, athletic directors, and/or coaches then spontaneously, from philosophical motivation, begin to ceaselessly work to add new programs for young people of both genders? Of course they did not. They still are not. History clearly demonstrates that new programs for boys were added most grudgingly and that without the force of Federal Title IX legislation the addition of sports activities for girls (other than the occasional "G.A.A. playday") might never have come about."

Fleming feels sports are like "good gangs" with an adult leader and that it pays, not costs to create sports programs for kids. "The more the better," said Fleming. Not all coaches and athletic administrators would agree with Fleming. Many coaches become protective of their favorite sport. A more unofficial reason for keeping out boys' volleyball is "favoritism" for other sports. Each school has finite number of athletes; some coaches and athletic directors, with an interest or preference for football, basketball, or whatever sport, attempt to guard their athletes for their sport. They perceive volleyball as another sport that will weaken existing programs taking not only players but gym time as well. Even off-season conflicts arise. Some football or basketball coaches want their players conditioning during the off-season not playing another sport like boys' volleyball.

Well, despite Title IX, despite the lack of school funds or coaches bias, high school boys' volleyball teams are springing up around the country because *the boys want to play volleyball and parents volunteer to help*. Once boys express an interest to their parents and coaches, then in many cases, the parents begin the process to develop a club at the high school, but it begins with the boys saying, "I want to play volleyball."

Two good examples are the Colorado and Maine stories. This past year John Kurach, a parent, volleyball coach, and newly appointed Junior Boys' Representative for USA volleyball, developed a new high school club league for the Denver and Colorado Springs areas. To achieve the Fall trial run for boys' volleyball, Kurach and company needed support and help from a number people. The first basic support, claims Kurach, needed to come from the boys. How many boys would sign up for volleyball? The first year eight high schools participated. Once they had the boys signed up, they went to the girls' volleyball coaches and solidified their support.

The new boys' club would need to use the girls' equipment. In return, the boys' volleyball program would help the girl's program with fundraising and general support. After that Kurach and company needed the school's athletic director's approval. Kurach says many of the athletic directors were concerned about conflicting schedules for the gym time. One athletic director pointed out that other groups, like the school choir, *might* need the gym for practice and refused to allow the boys' volleyball club a regular practice schedule. In that particular case, the school's club team had to schedule practices off campus. Their other major concern? They worried that boys' volleyball taking kids away from other sports.

The scheduling and general day-to-day operation of the new league belongs to a newly formed league, called the Colorado League of Mens' Volleyball, that hammered-out the details and match dates. This group, however, still needed help with insurance. Kurach recently solicited and received the support of USA Volleyball, the national headquarters for volleyball based in Colorado Springs, Colorado; the USAV would allow the new club league to come under their insurance umbrella. Each player in the league registered as a USAV player and paid a total club fee, of around \$100.

With the first year completed, Kurach, Hastings and Gaughan focused upon the more long range goal: To lobby CHSAA to sanction boys' volleyball as a high school sport. How does CHSAA feel about boys' volleyball? For

the present time, says Kurach, they're not interested in making boys' volleyball a sanctioned varsity sport; however, CHSAA recently approved two new girls' sports: field hockey and lacrosse.

The approval of these two sports for Colorado High Schools and how they won approval is how Hastings plans to try and win sanctioning of boys' volleyball. Hastings explained that both field hockey and lacrosse became high school clubs for a number of years before the CHSAA sanctioned them high school sport. Organizers for both sports developed 28 high school club teams or 10 % of the 280 high schools in Colorado before CHSAA sanctioned them as a high school sport. Hastings sees this number as key to getting boys' volleyball sanctioned. In his observations of the local and national scene, other school districts appeared to sanction a new sport when at least 10% of the schools participated some way in that sport. "Lacrosse girls when they had 28 schools that seemed to be the magic number and CHSAA officially made it a high school sport," said Hastings. "It appears that state sanctioning of boys volleyball will be a direct result of developing many high school teams."

For the 1998 season, 19 Colorado high schools will field boys' "club" teams at the high school. To continue increasing the number of boys' high school teams, Hastings targets the smaller high schools, the 1A and 2A schools, those schools playing the 6-man or 8-man football. Colorado is divided up into five equal divisions with approximately 57 schools per division, the 1A schools with under 50 kids in the high school, the 2A schools under a 100 kids per school. The 1A and 2A schools represent over 114 high schools, a significant number. In the 1A and 2A schools, football represents a very expensive undertaking according to Hastings. "The smaller schools are finding they're spending at least half their budget on football," said Hastings and he added, "and the kids that are serious about their football play at the larger schools." So far of the 57 Colorado 1A high schools, 32 have dropped their football program already. A trend that Hastings feels will continue not only in Colorado but around the country.

Hastings would like to see boys' volleyball replace the football programs at these schools. "I'm an advocate for more after school activities for kids," said Hastings. "If they (schools) are in a position where they're not playing football, consider boys' volleyball, something that will generate school spirit." Hastings hopes to win sanctioning of Colorado high school boys' volleyball in the near future.

The Maine Secondary Principals' Association, the governing body of Maine High School sports, recently approved boys' and girls' volleyball as a high school sport. But the work started seven years earlier when, John Raza, a "volleyball enthusiast" and a parent of two sons, requested the MSPA approve volleyball as a high school sport; they turned him down, though the association did say they would look at volleyball if another sport came along. To keep the momentum, Raza and a small group of volunteer parents put together a volleyball tournament for Maine high schools. This tournament consisted of three divisions: boys, girls and coed. Over the next five years, this annual tournament held in March, grew from three to 30 schools with the boys representing the largest group.

Don Simms, one of the organizers of the tournament, explained that the long-range purpose of this tournament, though, was to make volleyball a sanctioned high school sport for boys and girls in Maine. After the first three years, Simms and the organizers requested the MSPA sanction volleyball as a high school varsity sport. Again, the request was denied by association, but panel indicated they would consider volleyball when another sport request came along.

By the sixth year, the tournament organizers were looking for someone to take over — no one did. Instead Simms volunteered to organize a high school league. "The rational for doing this was that our tournament was producing four sport athletes out of three sport athletes, the kids weren't force to make a choice of sports during an actual season," said Simms. "The other reason was that if we wanted the Principal's Association to adopt the sport, I felt it was important to run the sport as they would so they could see that it could be successful."

With the same tournament volunteers, Simms ran the league. The first year the league garnered six boys teams, some of them coed, and two girls teams. This past fall the league increased to seven boys teams, some of them coed, and three girls teams. Simms, also, asked for help from USA Volleyball. John Kessel, Director of Programs for USA Volleyball, responded to Simms request. "His ability to promote the sport (in Maine) has been invaluable," said Simms. Over the next two seasons, Kessel traveled to Maine five times to speak at Maine's Physical Education Conference and to put on coaching and player clinics.

"Both seasons went well," said Simms. "Fortunately the principals had another sport come along (lacrosse) and we were voted in as a varsity sport for both girls and boys along with lacrosse. I might add that realistically, I

had anticipated running this league for about five years, so we are quite amazed at how quickly everything happened."

The Colorado and Maine experience points to the boys and parents themselves taking an active role in developing boys' volleyball as a sport. Competing against the excuses of Title IX, lack of money and favoritism will always be excuses. Anything worth while requires dedication and work. For some states, it will be as Hastings says, a long haul, but the rewards will be great. "Once you get state sanctioning," said Hastings, "the number of boys playing volleyball will go up 100 fold."

The question is when?