

It's hard work  
but ...  
they're having  
a ball!

USA's Liz  
Masakayan  
spikes a hard  
one over the  
net.

# The 1988 U.S. Olympic Volleyball Teams

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by CHP Officer Phil Konstantin, I.D. 11643

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**T**hink your life is stressful? Well, there exists a world where an entire life's work can be judged by only a few days' work. This world uses such words as blocks, aces, spikes, sets, dinks, jumps, nets and side-outs. These monumental stresses and unusual words are the standard fare for the athletes competing in Olympic volleyball.

Volleyball was invented by William G. Morgan in Holyoke, Massachusetts, back in 1895. During World War II, American servicemen spread its popularity overseas, and by 1949, international competition had begun. However, lacking any cohesive organization, U.S. teams did not fare well early in this American-born sport.

In 1975 in Pasadena, Texas, a significant change was instituted in the world of women's volleyball here in the United States. Through the efforts of national volleyball organizations and civic leaders in this Houston suburb, a national team training center was created.

Prior to the development of a year-round training center, this country's national teams were formed almost like a game of "pick-up" volleyball on the beach. Players would be teamed together to participate only in specific competitions, such as the World Cup. In

these circumstances, the players would practice together for about a month and then compete against teams of genuine international caliber. It was no wonder that U.S. teams seldom won.

The training center's aim was to establish a continuity in the American volleyball program. Hopefully, through an ongoing effort, the U.S. program could achieve a reputable position in the international community similar to its rankings in other Olympic and international events such as track and field.

Living in Pasadena at the time and doing public service programs for several Houston radio stations, I had the opportunity to interview both the players and the coaches and watch them play and practice on a regular basis.

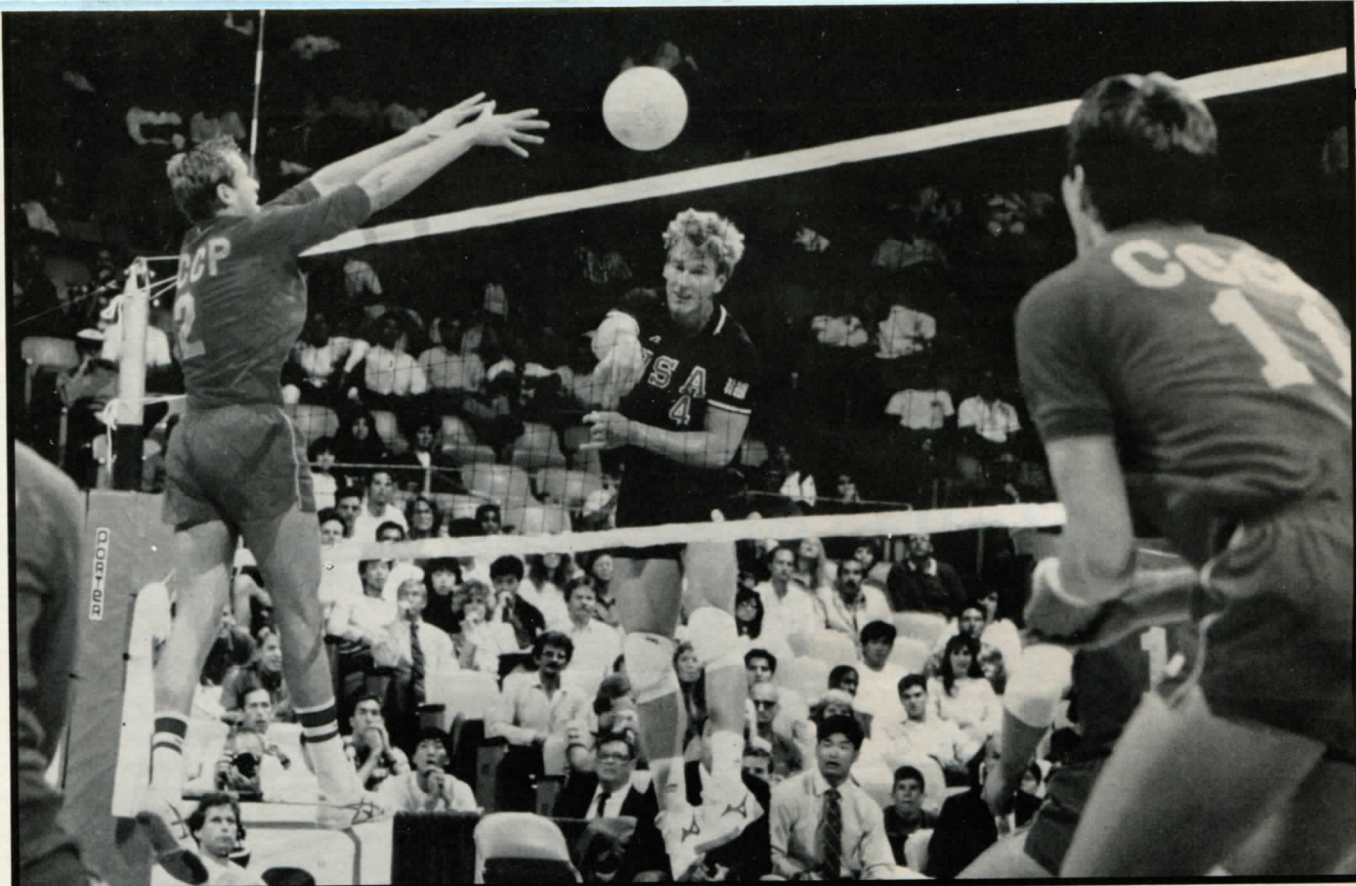
As the months went by, the women noticeably began to improve. However, because they were starting as a team so late, the women were unable to qualify for the 1976 Olympic Games. Noting the improvement in the women's program, though, in 1978 the U.S. men's team started a similar team training center in Dayton, Ohio. The year-round efforts finally paid off and the women's team qualified for the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow. But the United States

boycotted these Olympics so the team did not compete.

By 1981, both the men's and women's teams had relocated to California, with the men based in San Diego and the women working in Coto De Casa. Eventually, the women's team also came to San Diego, creating a truly national training center. San Diego's climate and apparent easy access to the majority of the nation's best players who lived in Southern California, made San Diego the ideal choice for the National Volleyball Headquarters. As one men's team member said, "When 95 percent of the team is from Southern California, who wants to go all the way to Ohio to play?"

One other basic success of the year-round team center concept has been the willingness of local businesses to provide jobs for many of the team members. This provides a steady source of income for the players and allows them to work around their busy practice, travel and playing schedule. (The team organization is always looking for more corporate and independent financial support. Interested groups should contact "Volleyball USA" in San Diego.)

Over the past decade, the team training center concept has proven



Bob Ctvrtlik, top photo, spikes the ball between two Russian players. Bottom photos show team members consulting with Head Coach Marv Dunphy, while also keeping fit for the competition.



to be extremely successful. In the 1984 Olympics, the men won the first U.S. Olympic medal in volleyball — and it was *GOLD*. The women also won their first medal — the *SILVER* — for second place. This was an impressive feat for teams that had not even competed in an Olympic Game since the 1968 Games in Mexico.

The route to the Olympics is complex in all sports, but especially volleyball. Four teams are guaranteed a position: 1) the winners in the previous Olympics; 2) the host country; 3) the winners of the previous World Cup (held the year after the Olympics); and, 4) the winners of the previous World

Championship (held two years after the Olympics). If any of these teams happen to win more than one of the events, the second place team would earn a berth. The other teams come from the winners of competitions within the five world zones: 1) North America/Central America/ Caribbean (NORCECA); 2) South America; 3) Europe; 4) Asia; 5) Africa.

Prior to the successes of 1984, the U.S. teams had a great deal of difficulties within the NORCECA zone. Even today, Cuba continues to be the perennial stumbling block to U.S. goals within our own zone.

Each Olympic team is limited to

12 players. Though the final Olympic team is subject to change right up to the opening ceremonies, the current men's team has four returning Olympians. The women's team was rebuilt in 1985, so they have no returning Olympic veterans.

Laurel Kessel was a part of the ill-fated 1980 Olympic team. After taking a seven-year leave from international competition, she regained a position on the team in 1987 and, at 34, is the oldest player on either team.

Caren Kemner is another cornerstone of the women's team, having been named its most valuable player for two years running. She is expected to be a driving force in

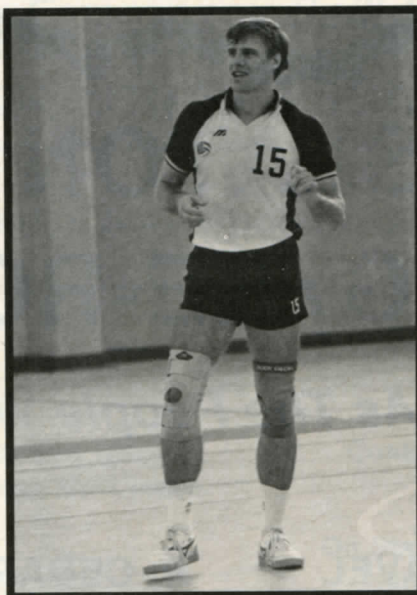
this year's Olympic Games in Korea.

The backbone of the men's team is Olympic veteran Karch Kiraly. He has been the team's most valuable player for three consecutive years and also has been a finalist for the Sullivan Award for the past three years. (The Sullivan Award is the AAU's award to the nation's best amateur athlete, and Kiraly was the only volleyball player to make the list.)

Perhaps the greatest tribute to Kiraly's skill came when the International Volleyball Federation named him the "World's Best Volleyball Player" — the first and, to date, only recipient of this honor.

Two other men to watch for are Steve Timmons and Craig Buck, both veterans of the 1984 Olympic team. Timmons is an outstanding outside hitter and Buck will be providing support services on defense as a blocker.

The United States' men's team currently is ranked No. 1 in the world. With their 1986 World Championship triumph, these men had won volleyball's triple crown: the Olympics, the World Cup and the World Championships. They



*Karch Kiraly was named most valuable player on the men's team for three consecutive years.*

are only the second team ever to perform this feat (the Soviet Union's men's team was the first).

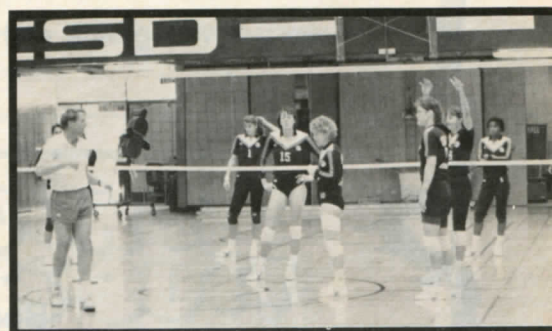
The women's team currently is ranked near the middle of the world's top 10 teams. Working hard on the fundamentals, the women hope to finish in the medal round in Seoul.

At the Pan American Games in August 1987, the men's team won the gold and the women's team

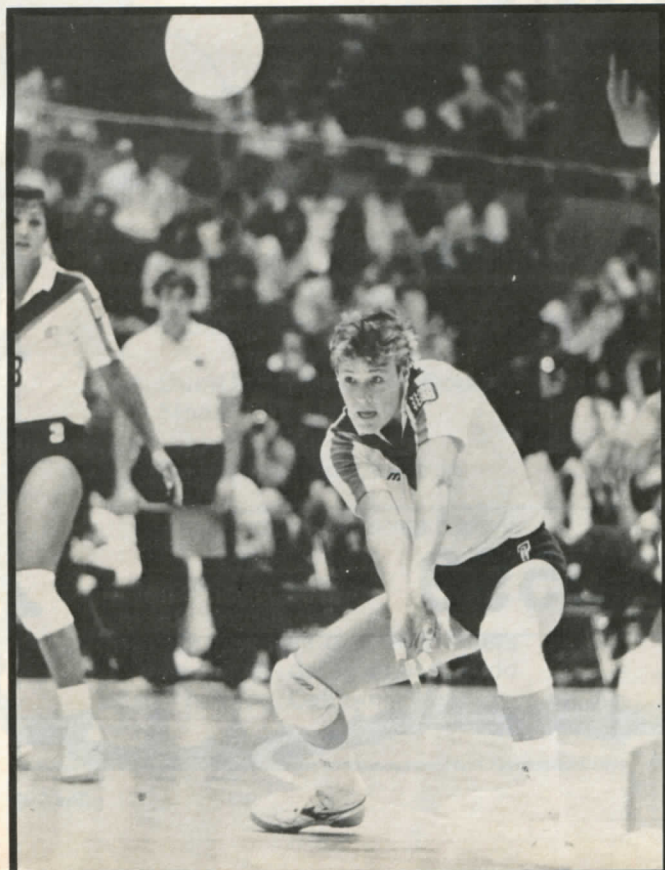
won the bronze medal.

It is interesting to note that American teams receive more notoriety in other countries than they get here in the United States. After a tournament in Japan, for example, players will receive fan mail from Japanese devotees for several weeks.

It has been 13 years since I saw the beginnings of the new U.S. national volleyball program and, during that time, there has been a lot of changes. Volleyball has become the second largest woman's participatory sport in the United States, and the women's team has won international recognition. The men's team has become the standard by which other teams are now judged.




*Hard work and determination keep these women ranked among the world's top 10 teams.*



*Caren Kemner was named most valuable player on the women's team for three consecutive years.*

Prospects for the 1988 Summer Olympic Games in Korea look good. It takes profound dedication to endure a daily schedule of two to four hours of practice and then face the rigors of competition. Watching these men and women play, you can easily see their enthusiasm, pride, drive, determination and skill. With the growing international enthusiasm for this sport, volleyball is sure to be one of the "hot tickets" in Korea this summer.

You can't help but share the patriotic pride these players feel when, while standing alongside the court, I watched the women break from their pre-game huddle with a roaring cheer of "U-S-A!"

Okay, Korea, I think they're ready. 



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