

The state of Michigan steps closer to making volleyball for males possible

Michigan State's men's volleyball club and head coach Sante Perrelli have played a key role in the sport's growth in the state of Michigan. Since 1987, Perrelli and his teams have made the sport more popular and attracted new players, thanks to camps and other opportunities to play volleyball.

There's been enough growth in recent years that the Michigan High School Athletic Association is adding boys volleyball as an official sport for the 2025-26 school year.

"There are more boys playing volleyball in the state of Michigan than we ever have," said Perrelli. "[The club's] claim to fame for many years was that we taught lots of boys to play. We've been at this for many years, to try and provide an opportunity. We've done camps and clinics all over the state and country for many years trying to promote boys volleyball."

There are around 60 members, divided among four teams, this year. However, when Perrelli helped revive the club as an assistant coach in 1987, student participation wasn't this popular. Perrelli credits the original club members for their passion for growing the game, despite lower interest.

"We had a real special group back then," said Perrelli. "They were very dedicated to making it popular and we came out of the blue largely due to them."

Tim Forrester was the club president in 1990, and a person whom Perrelli highlights for laying the strong foundation for the club in its early years.

"Tim was really an important person because he did a lot of outreach and that helped us move forward," said Perrelli. "We worked with other Big Ten schools to create what we called the Big Ten Men's Volleyball Association. We formed a conference and started playing home-away matches and the early sacrifices that they made helped popularize the sport at Big Ten schools."

The club started a golf outing this year in honor of Forrester, who died from cancer in 2022 at 55. The outing is a way to invite back alumni and keep connections among past generations of the club.

When Perrelli joined the club as an assistant, the head coach at the time would hold tryouts and make cuts. Perrelli knew that he would change that policy and allow for more students to play and learn the game if he was in charge

“We had to figure out a way to give people a chance to play as we became more popular and the tryouts got bigger,” said Perrelli. “We never cut anybody. In the 1990s, we would just put them in the city league, we’d put them in the church leagues, we’d put them in an open tournament, and they’d play in the intramural leagues.”

MSU has its top squad, the Green team, along with the MSU White, MSU Posse, and MSU Greenhorns. The top three teams have been established since the 1990s while the Greenhorns were added in recent years due to increased participation.

Setter and current club President Jake Reishus loves the amount of participation that MSU has and is excited to see what the future holds for the sport.

“Having four teams, it’s more than almost every other school in the country,” said Reishus, who is from Chicago, where boys volleyball has been a high school sport in Illinois since 1992. “It’s super awesome to have such a large group, especially in a state that doesn’t have high school boys volleyball.”

Reishus added, “The fact that we’re able to build such a strong in both quantity and quality culture here for a sport that doesn’t really have the younger group playing the sport just yet. I can’t wait to see how much better it gets now that we’re going to have younger guys playing the sport.”

Perrelli feels that this is an important time for club athletics with the changing landscape of college athletics.

“There’s such an enormous monetization that has gone on, but for the students, it’s more about opportunity than money,” said Perrelli. “For everyday students, they just want to play and have an opportunity. If they have an opportunity to play against another school while they’re wearing the green and white and represent the school. That is such an honor in their lives.

“It’s critical to maintain that kind of commitment to opportunity. Not just for the current students, but for future students, and also because it demonstrates that club sports can be a very legitimate way to actually provide athletic opportunities.”

Despite giving credit to the players from over the years, Perrelli's players recognize the impact he's had on them and the sport. Reishus says that he has learned so much from Perrelli and sees the effect he's had on the sport and others.

"I've hardly met anyone who loves the game more than him," said Reishus. "He strives to be such a great person and a great leader. It's super nice to have someone like that constantly wanting you to always be the best person, the best player you can be."

Perrelli is adamant about crediting the hard work and dedication of the students when the club was started.

"We had some really amazing sacrifices by the students early on," said Perrelli. "Russ Rivet used to say 'winners find solutions and losers make excuses' so that was our motto early on. We established a standard."

Link to article:

<https://www.wkar.org/wkar-news/2024-12-09/the-state-of-michigan-steps-closer-to-making-volleyball-for-males-possible>