



Volleyball team from Fountain Valley's TCA: 50 players landed partial or full scholarships in past year

BIG BUMP

Girls Volleyball Draws Driven Players, Coaches, Parents

■ By SHERRI CRUZ

There's money in women's college volleyball.

That's spurred an industry in Orange County based on training girls to land college scholarships. The county counts 33 volleyball clubs, more than any other region in Southern California, according to the Anaheim-based Southern California Volleyball Association.

"Every year we have a bunch of startup clubs," said Shannon Davenport, who works at the association, where her mother Ann Davenport serves as regional commissioner. "Girls volleyball is becoming a business."

The clubs train girls up to age 18 to play com-

petitively. Many have boys' teams. But girls make up about 95% because that's where the money is.

"There's very little money for collegiate men's volleyball," Davenport said.

Most scholarships for guys go to football, basketball and baseball.

Funding for women's sports has been boosted through the years by Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, a sometimes controversial federal law that called for equality in men's and women's college sports.

Clubs in Orange County include Las Playas Volleyball Club in Huntington Beach, Excel Volleyball Club in Mission Viejo, Seal Beach

Volleyball

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Coast Volleyball
to \$3,000 for the
through July.
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Each volleyball tour comes to Huntington Beach each year, with 2009's competition set for later this month.

Beach volleyball Olympic gold medalists Misty May-Treanor and Karch Kiraly are from here. Retired Olympic volleyball player and coach Debbie Green also grew up in OC. She became the first woman to enter the Orange County Sports Hall of Fame in 1998 and helped put women's volleyball on the map.

Anaheim is home to the U.S. National Men's Volleyball Team and the U.S. National Women's Volleyball Team. The women's team recently relocated to Anaheim. Kiraly, who lives in San Clemente, is an assistant coach.

The national teams practice at Anaheim's American Sports Centers, where volleyball clubs compete in tournaments on the weekend.

Competitive

Club volleyball isn't for the faint-hearted. It's highly competitive and made up of high achievers all around—players, coaches and parents—who often clash.

"There are some parents who just lose it," says Jeffrey Nitta, whose daughter, Madison Nitta, played at Fountain Valley-based TCA Volleyball Inc. and now attends Rowling Green State University in Ohio on a scholarship.

"Parents have a hard time listening to someone else saying their kids are not tall enough or fast enough," Nitta said. "If their kid is not playing, they threaten to quit. When I first started I felt the same way."

Girls volleyball competition is so fierce that many players on high school teams have several years of club volleyball behind them. Club competition is stiffer than high school because it can attract players from a wide geographic region.

Some players travel a long way to play for a certain club.

Nitta traveled back and forth for five years from Manhattan Beach, where he lives, to Fountain Valley so his daughter could play on the TCA team. They made financial sacrifices, too, downsizing from a sport utility vehicle to a Volkswagen Beetle.

"I was lucky. I had my own business, so I could take off," he said.

Nitta owns Hokusai Restaurant in Beverly Hills.

Recruiting for college volleyball often starts at the club level. In some cases, girls are verbally committing to colleges by the time



Mason with TCA team: company has 72 teams in nine cities

College recruiters attend tournaments in Anaheim, where the atmosphere is highly sparked, or "nuts" as one parent put it.

"You'll see college recruiters all around," said Lynda Frederick.

She owns Santa Ana-based Sun Industries Inc., which outfits companies and schools with energy-efficient lighting.

"You'll see parents freaking out," she said.

Her daughter Lilla Frederick played for TCA and now is the starting outside hitter at Pepperdine University.

TCA is one of the clubs that touts the prospect of scholarships.

It attracts a lot of elite players. The bread and butter player is the girl who wants to make the high school team.

In the past year, 50 TCA players landed full or partial scholarships to schools such as Arizona State University, Stanford University and North Carolina State University.

In TCA's eight years in business, 150 kids have received some sort of scholarship. TCA employs 11 people in Fountain Valley and 150 altogether. Most are coaches (two for each team). TCA has 72 teams in nine cities across the nation, including Austin, Texas, and Atlanta.

The company doesn't disclose revenue.

The Orange County TCA teams, grouped by ages, play at the Los Caballeros Racquet & Sports Club in Fountain Valley.

Neil Mason, who founded TCA at 22, owns all of the clubs.

on a volleyball scholarship for California State University, Long Beach. Mason started TCA with four teams.

He enlisted Bruce Powers to help him coach. Powers, who owns AutoWerkes Inc., an auto repair business in Huntington Beach, coaches in the evenings for the love of the sport.

"Volleyball is life," he said. "It's not just volleyball."

Coaches don't earn much, \$400 to \$600 month, though some can be salaried.

Mason's Complete Athlete Inc. has delved into other aspects of volleyball, such as making knee pads, which it does in China. Powers and Mason also are writing a book on volleyball.

Parents can spend upward of \$10,000 per year, including for club fees, private training sessions, tournament fees and gear purchases.

"The return is USC," Mason said.

The University of Southern California is a popular college among OC's volleyball parents.

"Goal No. 1 is a scholarship," Mason said.

The No. 2 goal: "to be a better person because you've been in our program," he said.

"That's how we sell what we do," Mason said. "We sell the complete athlete."

Parents, often highly competitive entrepreneurs themselves, eat it up.

But not at first.

"At the beginning, we thought it was torture," parent Frederick said.

TCA's program is tough.

know what to expect when they are freshmen, Powers said.

The girls dive for the ball, just like the boys do.

"We don't have female athletes. We have athletes that happen to be female," Mason said.

Discipline is part of the deal.

"We don't have hoochie attire," Mason said. "No flip flops."

Mason said he expects players to set goals outside of volleyball as well.

While playing on the TCA team, Frederick's daughter missed school dances and didn't date much. But her four-year scholarship at Pepperdine made it all worth it.

"It's definitely paid off," Frederick said.

After the expense and the time commitment of several years of club play, a scholarship can be a wash. But satisfaction for hard work is the reward, according to Frederick.

"You're just so proud of them," she said.

Not every club touts scholarships.

Saddleback Valley Volleyball Club in Lake Forest, which has 32 teams in the county—the most in OC—takes a different tack.

Owner Becky Carey, who runs the club with her husband, George, says at the get-go: "If you're here for a scholarship, you're in the wrong place."

Many of the girls have hopes for scholarships, Carey said. But most just want to make the high school team.

Parent Management

The biggest challenge for clubs is parent management. Parents, often driven individuals themselves, want their daughters to be starters.

"Parents are the biggest issue, especially if they are parents who didn't play sports themselves," said Bob O'Brien, owner of Seal Beach Volleyball Club.

O'Brien founded the club 17 years ago and worked at General Electric Co. and Westinghouse Electric Co. until he retired.

"They think they can try to get kids to play more," O'Brien said. "They're trying to manipulate the entire process."

The good clubs keep the parents sidelined.

"That's the maintenance part of what we do," said O'Brien, who coaches and still plays competitive volleyball. "But there are so many things that are so joyful about what we do."

Mason said he draws the line for parents. They dare not cross it.

He's "the volleyball whisperer," Nitta said. "It's not the dog. It's the owner of the dog that's the problem. It's all about the parents."

Nitta said Mason once lectured him that his daughter might not be on the top team.

"That was a rude awakening," he said.

But it's all been worth it for his daughter, Nitta said.

"It changed her whole life," he said.

Her major is sports marketing.

"She may want to get into coaching," Nitta



Mason: "We don't have hoochie attire"

Something is wrong with a planning process that turns down offers to serve the flying public—from both current and new carriers—and thereby exacerbates a downturn in business.

The existing process asks airport management to do the impossible—accurately predict both air travel demand and airline load factors more than a year in advance—in order to maintain a cushion

Runway: airport capped at 10.3 million passengers

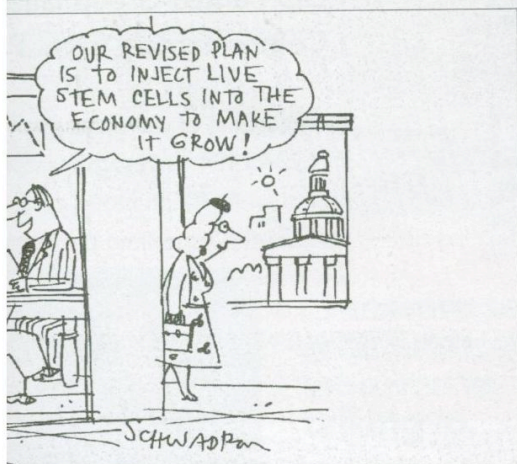
empty—below the passenger cap negotiated in 2003. It does not have to be this way. The county owns and operates the airport, which sits in an unincorporated county island adjoining three cities—Newport Beach, Costa Mesa and Irvine. The county entered into an agreement with Newport Beach in 1985 to settle litigation brought by that city and its residents. The agreement was to expire in 2005, but as the El Toro airport project was collapsing, the parties voluntarily reacted early, amended and extended the Newport agreement until 2015.

There is no requirement that this agreement continue forever. In compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act, the county has prepared environmental impact reports considering the effect of eliminating passenger caps. Balancing the interests of travelers and airport neighbors, county supervisors chose not to take that option. They have another chance in preparation for 2015. Newport Beach has the right to sue over flaws in any environmental report, but otherwise has no legal authority over the county's utilization of its airport.

As OC builds a costly new third terminal at John Wayne—and faces a new round of discussions with Newport Beach—it seems prudent to reconsider whether imposing a passenger cap is good business.

Airport neighbors should be protected by restrictions on aircraft noise, by zoning of the adjacent land and by preserving the airport's nighttime curfew, but not by turning away customers.

Kranser is editor of www.eltoroairport.org, which opposed development of an airport at the former El Toro Marine base.



Yet you do not pull over to the side of the freeway. You're focused on reaching your destination safe and sound.

For Orange County company leaders who sit behind the wheel, it takes courage to move ahead during a recession.

Many executives may determine it is better to continue forward than retrench—knowing that as competitors slow or pause in reaction to a downturn, selective investments can improve their companies' relative positions.

Business leaders study "for sale" signs to acquire strategically; generate value from intellectual property; make strategic investments in technology for improved business operations; and invest in brand and advertising.

They know that advertising in a downturn buys "a louder voice" as competitors may be more apt to cut advertising dollars. They also seek opportunities to add key staff as there is a larger talent pool available.

Last but not least, they ratchet up their competitive advantages through evolutionary innovation.

In essence, they do not "pull over." They do not slash research and development because they know that during tough times, like today, they are likely to go through a significant transformation in their business models, leaving them with stronger, nimbler and more efficient companies.

In the long term, cutting may leave the company with fewer options, as visionary competitors and their innovations pass it by.

thing that isn't a sure thing—whether considering investments in R&D or leading-edge technology for business operations. Though, we know that staying within your comfort zone isn't necessarily the best choice.

When faced with the need to severely curtail spending, leaders at a Fortune 500 company decided they had no time or budget to spare to pursue the untapped potential of leading-edge information technology.

The company cut back on investing on customer-facing technologies and tools to aid its support staff, focusing solely on limited operational investments.

A major competitor, meanwhile, took its investment dollars and looked beyond any short-term limitations. In the long term, the competitor not only won with better and more effective technology, but processes and services that were more customer-friendly and efficient.

The competitor continued to invest its gains, and it grew exponentially. As a result, the now trailing Fortune 500 company may never catch up.

The bottom line is that agile leaders know to leave key assets, such as R&D and strategic business technologies, alone when facing falling revenue, remaining committed to future innovation and future success.

Samsvick is managing partner for KPMG LLP's Orange County office. His commentary represents his own views and not necessarily those of his firm.



SPEAK

Quotes from this week's Business Journal

"We don't have hoochie attire."
On the discipline required from the players in his volleyball club.
Neil Mason, see story page 1

"It's been drinking out of a fire hose."
On the hectic experience that was purchasing the San Diego Padres.
Jeff Moorad, see story page 12

"We continue to believe 2009 will be more of a challenge than 2008."
What CommerceWest Bank is expecting this year.
Ivo Tjan, see story page 7

"Discounting is for those without stellar service."
On high-end resorts not cutting rates despite the economy.
Giuseppe Lama, see story page 20

"It's a shrinking market, especially in California."
On KFC diversifying from its fried chicken staple.
Mark Hardison, see story page 3

"That's an insult in the Chinese culture."
On Chinese tourists being offended by the visa requirement of a full set of fingerprints.
David Yu, see story page 22

"Over time that would be bad for QLogic."
On Broadcom trying to buy QLogic rival Emulex.
Craig Berger, see story page 1

"It's a huge draw for us."
On Irvine attracting visitors because of its reputation for safety.
Jennifer McLaughlin, see story page 23

