

Yorkton Stories

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The volleyball factory of the 1980s

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Dick DeRyk

When it comes to Yorkton sports dynasties, the dominance of Yorkton volleyball teams and players in the 1980s stands out. The senior Terrier hockey teams that won three league titles and four provincial championships between 1967 and 1972 before that league folded, giving way to the junior Terriers, was a dynasty in that era. But nothing compares to the boys volleyball teams of the 1980s and the players, all 18 and under in age.

Most were coached by Dennis Pomeroy, who became a legend in the sport. The Yorkton Regional High School Raiders boys teams won nine consecutive provincial championships in that decade, and the male club teams - the Macs - had their share of successes. For many of the male players, volleyball stuck with them, and they stuck with volleyball. Of the 19 players who formed the 1982 juvenile (that's age 18 and under) and midget (age 16 and under) Macs teams, six are still very actively involved in the sport as coaches, referees, and officials.

The girls teams did not receive the attention of their male counterparts. They flew somewhat under the radar. But that same decade was the start of outstanding volleyball success for one player, the pinnacle of whose career was playing for Canada in the 1996 Olympic.

Dennis Pomeroy coached both the Yorkton Regional High School boys volleyball teams, and the Macs club teams. When the Saskatchewan Volleyball Hall of Fame inducted the 1987 Saskatchewan men's Canada Games gold medal winning team, it was noted that Dennis played a major role in its success. "Dennis ran the volleyball factory out of Yorkton and contributed seven members to the 1987 Canada Games champions," his citation reads. Seven of the 13 players on that team were from Yorkton.

We talked to six players from that era to ask the question, "Just what was it about volleyball back then, and still now?" We talked with four men who played on the 1982 Macs, all still very much involved in the sport. They are Scott Borys, Rob Pasishnik, Blaine Tendler, and Dion Pfeifer. Others from those teams who continued their involvement are Brian Gavlas and Paul Procyshyn. We also talked with Olympian Lori-Ann Mundt, and Deane Martin now, Martin-Gray, who credits her

Yorkton coach Dave Baron for a long career as not just a high school volleyball coach, but also as a teacher and school administrator.

Blaine Tendler has spent his adult life in volleyball, first as a coach for two years in Europe after graduating from the University of Regina in 1991, and since then in the United States, where he is now the Associate Head Coach for A&T University's Aggies women's team playing in NCAA Division One Volleyball. A&T is in Greensboro, North Carolina. It dates back to 1891 and is a historically black research university.

Before starting there in 2016, he had owned, and coached at, a volleyball club in Piedmont, South Carolina; spent 14 years with USA Volleyball high performance program as an assistant and head coach for teams that competed in international competitions in Nicaragua and Czechia, and he has worked with volleyball teams in Trinidad and Tobago. His wife, Mary was the head volleyball coach at nearby Elon University, just down the road on I40, also a Division 1 program. She has retired from coaching and is now a sports administrator at the university.

Blaine Tendler

I would say, just the success that the program had made it such a fun sport to play. Dennis was pretty amazing as a coach. I remember just how cutting edge he was. We'd be in practice, and he was really good at explaining the why piece of things. "So we're going to pass this way, because this is what the Japanese men's teams are doing, and they're one of the best ball handling teams in the world, right?" Oh, okay, I want to be one of the best in the world. Let's go. I think that was a big piece of it. Just the tradition, the level that was available.

I know for me personally, basketball was what I started playing in junior high, and my first two years, I kind of sat the bench a lot, and when I got to ninth grade, I decided I'm going to try volleyball, just for fun, and I started. And so when I got to high school, I went, Well, I'm probably gonna, if I make a team, I'm gonna sit the benches as a 10th grader anyway, but at least it's only hopefully one year where if I played basketball again, it would be sitting on the bench again. And I just, you know, I want to play, and I ended up making a team, making the varsity team, and played a little bit my for my 10th grade, and then just got hooked and started in club, and it just snowballed and fell in love with the sport, and knew at some point I wanted to be a coach. And, yeah. Dennis got me involved with that because he was at a junior high, and he's like, "Hey, Tendler, you're running my spring League." I'm like, "Um, okay." He didn't really ask. He just kind of told me. And so that was like a two month come over to the junior high practice a couple days a week for the first few weeks, and then then run it as a league kind of thing, and one day practice, one day play, and kept going from there.

Dick DeRyk

So you spent the last 40 plus years actually coaching? What did you take away from your experience in Yorkton that has stood you in good stead on your coaching career?

Blaine Tandler

Dennis was an amazing coach and how he treated the team, the players, with the emphasis on being cutting edge, on always learning, always trying to be better, was great. I ran track when I was young, and Dave Barron, Len Bode, same thing, phenomenal coaches. And how they treated you as an athlete always stuck with me that made it easier to be successful in coaching and to have longevity, because you just had great, great mentors to bounce ideas off of or to learn from.

Dick DeRyk

You went to the US after a couple of years in Europe. What was the attraction of coaching in the US versus perhaps back in Canada?

Blaine Tandler

My wife was from the US, so that was part of it, and just the US. Sports system was bigger, I would say, more developed than the Canadian system. For example, Division One women's volleyball has almost 350 teams. Like North Carolina, there's almost as many university programs in North Carolina as there is in Canada. Much more opportunity. My wife, again, was from the US. She was a phenomenal player. Spent a year and a half on the US National Team, kind of thing, so it just made more sense to be here.

Dick DeRyk

Did you meet through volleyball?

Blaine Tandler

Yeah, we did, actually. The US team that she was with came to U of R for a Canada Cup tournament, just a mini four team tournament, and I was at U of R at the time. Our Canadian team was based out of U of R, and I was doing my internship with them, and had been working with the program, volunteering for almost my entire years at U of R. So I was in charge of the practices and overseeing and the facility kind of thing. And yeah, we met, we hung out, we stayed in touch. And yeah, 32 years of marriage later, we're still hanging in there.

Dick DeRyk

She was coaching until this past season, she was coaching at a different university that was in the same division as you were. Did that lead to interesting conversations around the dinner table?

Blaine Tandler

Yeah, we talked a little bit more the last two years than we did the first year. I think the first year was kind of awkward. We got heckled a lot by our friends. I think the most popular joke was, "We have an extra room if you need it. One of you want to, you know, crash?" "Who's staying at a hotel for the weekend?" The first year was weird. After that for me, it was just more matches. I'm not

playing she's not playing. Our marriage, for both of us, was just way more important than a couple of matches, and that's kind of how we approached it. And we would talk once in a while about what's going on with our team, I think, a little bit more this past year than the first two.

Dick DeRyk

You obviously didn't discuss each other strategies when it came to play.

Blaine Tandler

No, no, but scouting, there's so much video out there, there would be nothing I could tell her that she wouldn't already know.

Dick DeRyk

What is ahead for you? You're a longtime coach. Your wife is retired from coaching. Are you getting to the point where you're thinking of maybe doing something else?

Blaine Tandler

Yeah, retirement sounds better and better every year. The landscape of sports here is changing so much. It's turning into almost like a semi-pro league being able to pay players. Basically pay to play. It's not the same as it used to be, and just some of the stuff you have to deal with is crazy. And I don't know that I want to do that much longer. Having to do, because it's only going to get more and more where I think your recruiting conversation with kids are going to be, "How much are you going to pay me to come play? Yeah, you're going to give me the scholarship, but how much of my making after that?" Talking with a college coach friend of mine, it's like, if I wanted to coach pro I'd go over to Europe, because at least there the playing fields level. Being retired is sounding better and better, for sure. But I got a few more years in me, I think. We've got a pretty special group of young kids that just came into our program this past fall. Six freshmen; they're hilarious. They made it so much fun to come in the gym every day. And I'm excited about our next two recruiting classes that have committed already. I can see a few more years in me, for sure.

Dick DeRyk

The Pfeifer name has been closely associated with volleyball and Yorkton for decades. Don Pfeifer as a referee of national and international stature, and his son Dion as a player and coach. Dion played on championship High School and club teams under Dennis Pomeroy in the 1980s, and in 1987 won a gold medal at the Canada games representing Saskatchewan. He played for the U of S University of Saskatchewan Huskies. Played senior men's volleyball, and then the early 1990s he was the three time Saskatchewan beach volleyball champion. He taught high school in Saskatoon and coached winning teams for 10 years before moving back to Yorkton, where, for two decades, starting in 2002, he was one of the guiding forces behind the Yorkton Regional High School Raiders senior boys team. He retired from teaching in 2022 but retirement from coaching didn't last long. He and his wife Michelle took on coaching the Raiders senior girls team the following year. Michelle is also a volleyball talent of renown, and as a team, they have coached, conducted

summer volleyball camps, and organized clubs since 1998. Yorkton, most prairie communities, hockey is big, baseball is big. More recently, soccer is big. What's the attraction for kids to get into volleyball?

Dion Pfeifer

I think back then, times have changed over the last 20, 25, years, but back then, I'm not sure. I think it was, we had the two junior highs. You developed your skills at that grade seven level, grade eight level. There's some club volleyball. Even back then, Dennis Pomeroy had started, and so there's some interest there and a little bit of success. So as you get to a certain age, you hear about the success and the traveling that these teams did. Western Canadians were national championships. Think at the time, football wasn't quite around. Hockey wasn't quite maybe as popular? And it kind of depends on the age group, and just the group of people at a particular age, like, my group, we had a number of really good high end athletes that kind of dabbled in hockey a little bit here and there, but weren't serious. They were more into the school sports. So that commitment to the volleyball sport of it, volleyball side of it, was there, and then we just became good friends, and then continued from there. At a very young age, from that grade eight level, for sure.

So I think the choices have changed over the last number of years, between the hockey, you know, higher end hockey, and the football programs and things like that. So on the boys, male side of it, there's more choices. So the numbers have gone down a little bit. There's still some really good, interesting, some good athletes. I think back then in the 80s, it was kind of the number one thing to do. And then success breeds success, as well. So once you see these teams doing, you know, great things in the province and in Canada, I think the younger group just wanting to do the same thing, any part of it.

Dick DeRyk

You spent, what, about 30 years coaching? What is the secret to coaching success, especially young people?

Dion Pfeifer

Each player is unique. My philosophy is make sure they have fun. Teach them the fundamentals, right, and incorporate the fun part of it as well, just within the individual drills and the team drills. Sometimes be a cheerleader, sometimes be a little harder on them. Kind of get a feel for each individual personality. You can't blanket everybody across the board in a certain way, right? So...

Dick DeRyk

Not everybody's the same.

Dion Pfeifer

Not everybody's the same, no. So I think just the interest, and then once you get, like I said, get a little bit of success, and they see that they're improving, even their individual skills, and we see the team doing, you know, having some success, then they want to even work harder in practice, you know, the next week, and continue that success. And the history of volleyball comes up a little bit, with that as well. And I'm a little, like I said, my interest volleyball is there. I'm a teacher, retired teacher now, but I've taught students, and I've seen their successes, just in the math classroom, for example, right? So I want to see them improve their skills, and give back to the athlete as much as the sport has given back to me in the past, as well.

Dick DeRyk

Were there any coaches or people in volleyball that you recognize as having been an influence on you?

Dion Pfeifer

Starting with my dad, who's an international rep, more so, that was his thing with the volleyball part of it, known throughout Canada and internationally as well. He got me into it as he coached, and then he backed away from the coaching. And Bob Metzler was the junior high coach at the time when I started, and he was good, and I said, we had a good group of athletes and friends that I kind of grew up with in the sport. And then once the club started and found out about the club, part of it where you can continue from December until May, and staying involved with the sport and having success too. Dennis Pomeroy was that coach for my whole career, back communities as well. Bob Metzler was kind of the coach in the junior high season for September, October, November. And then Dennis kind of took over right after that, right until May, when all the national championships were, so.

Dick DeRyk

What made Dennis so successful? I knew him, seemed to be fairly laid back away from the gym. Was he different as a coach?

Dion Pfeifer

He was laid back, personality used in the bandage and lean on his elbow, on the back of the chair, things like that. Wouldn't say a whole lot. Very few times we could get real excited, positive or negative. But work like a dog in practice, you listen carefully. There is no goof around. There is very specific techniques, technical aspects of the game that you did, you did over and over and over until you did it right. And he would not give up on you until you did it right. He'd force you to do it the correct way. And I think that just helped us. And like I said, the mindset of his players were you wanted to do it correctly. You wanted to be good, you wanted to be successful for the future. And we knew what we had to do, what he said as a demonstrator, athlete himself, loyal player. We all said we don't think he's ever played much in the past, but his knowledge of the game right from junior high to high school level was probably untouched at the time throughout Canada, as far as

we were for small towns like Yorkton to compete with the big cities, we were right there with him, with our group of athletes. So a lot of success goes to him, and just the way he treated his players and the expectations he had, we took it to heart.

Dick DeRyk

Has coaching changed over the past 30 years? As far as dealing with students, young adults?

Dion Pfeifer

I don't think so. I think the skills are the skills. The skills haven't changed. There's a few philosophical differences in terms of how to do a particular skill, technique wise. Some different things out there last even 10 years compared to back then. But volleyball's still volleyball. You know, the passing, the hitting, the setting, digging, all that stuff. So in terms of treating the athletes, I don't think there's much. Every coach is different too. Some are excited on the sideline, up and down the sideline, walking around, yelling, screaming. Some are cheerlead. More cheerleaders. I am more a detailed technical coach, and I'm kind of watching sometimes, when we watch the ball, I watch my players on my side of the court and make sure I'm teaching almost at the same time as they're playing. Sometimes too much. I've always been a quiet personality, so that cheerleader part of me will come out once a while, but not as often as I've seen other coaches do that too, right? So whether that's good or bad, my wife kind of is the other way. So...

Dick DeRyk

I was gonna say because you're now a coaching team as well. So she takes a different approach?

Dion Pfeifer

Yeah, yeah. So she does more of the cheering part. More outward, positive part, and I'm more the, "You should have been here, you should have done this," or "Let's do this next time," type of thing, so.

Dion Pfeifer

Has the game changed over the last 30 years, or the 40 plus years that you've been involved?

Dion Pfeifer

Yeah, athletes are just bigger. They're stronger. They work out off the court year round, and I think that's with any sport the last 15-20, years, if you don't want to be left behind and everybody else is doing the extras off the court, so you better do the extra so they don't catch up kind of thing, or you're going to keep up with them. I think just the size and the power of the athletes is that much greater than when we played. I mean, I'm 5' 11"; our games, middles were 6' 2" - 6' 3", couple of power hitters, where my height are maybe a little bit bigger nowadays. Setters are 6' 6". You know, middles are 6' 9", 6' 8", and it's just a different kind of game. It's more of a power game, for sure.

Dick DeRyk

As we mentioned, girls volleyball in the 1980s just didn't get the publicity and attention that was heaped on the boys teams. But that doesn't mean it didn't do well, resulting in several girls going on to bigger things in the sport. One of those was Deane Martin, a physical education teacher and senior boys and girls volleyball coach in Aberdeen, northeast of Saskatoon, for 26 years. She is now a school administrator in Warman, but says her passion for volleyball was passed on to her daughter, Sara, who is a top under-18 player on championship teams in Saskatchewan and about to graduate from grade 12 this spring. She points to many mentors and coaches from her time in Yorkton, Dave Baron, Nancy Baker-Tomblin, Randy Shuster, Don Pfeifer, Dennis Pomeroy and fellow players Brian Gavlas and Rob Pasishnik among them, and credits them for her love of the game and the opportunity to coach her own daughter since Sara was in elementary school. Together Deane and Sara have been able to travel to Hungary and Croatia where Sara played in world championships. She says, "Sara has far exceeded my contributions to the sport but I enjoy coaching her and cheer her on any opportunity I get."

Deane Martin

Dave Baron. Mr. Barron was my, not only my teacher, but my volleyball coach. Don Pfeifer was the vice principal at that time, so he had a big influence. But Dave Baron is the reason I not only became a teacher, but an administrator, and I got my passion from volleyball from him. There were other teachers in there too, in the junior high level, like Nancy Baker, that really were good leaders. But Dave is the reason I became a teacher and where I found my passion for volleyball. And later in high school, I guess that would be Randy Schuster. He ran a great program. And on the male side of that would have been Dennis Pomeroy. And I think because the boys had such a strong program, and one provincials eight, nine, ten years in a row. Us girls, we had some really decent players, like Lori-Ann Mundt, who went on to, she was my setting partner, went on to play in the Olympics. We just flew on their coattails and really had a great time.

Dick DeRyk

Was there a connection between the boys and the and the girls teams and those ladies?

Deane Martin

Not, not officially, but Dion Pfeifer lived down the street for me, and his dad was an administrator, so we got into that school early in the morning at eight, and we could stay at till 8pm. So as a setter, those boys, all they wanted me to do was set them up. So I would set for hours after school. Brad Surjik, Dion Pfeifer, Mark Stebner, and I'm sure it's because of my sets that they got so good. No, I'm just kidding, but he got in that school a lot of extra time, unofficially. And then, of course, when the boys team got so good, by the time we were in high school, we got to go on some really cool trips. We went to Nova Scotia because of the boys reputation, and they ended up winning that tournament in lower Sackville. I think us girls got sixth or something like that. The boys won, and we got to go on this week long exchange and join their school and go on their

rowing team, and that's the first time many of us even flew and it was because of the boys program that Dennis Pomeroy was running. But boy, we had fun with that, too.

Dick DeRyk

Your daughter, Sara, who is now, will be graduating grade 12 this spring, has had a pretty terrific career in volleyball for somebody young, what was her motivation? Was it because of you?

Deane Martin

Well, I like to think that my passion was instilled in her little bit. I was a I'm a high school administrator and old phys ed teacher. So growing up, Sara's growing up, I ran tournaments eight times a year in Aberdeen for the Fall high school season, of course. My husband's a firefighter, so he works shift work, so I'd often have both kids out with me. So they kind of grew up in a volleyball bucket. When they were that one, two, three year old they'd come to every tournament with me on Saturday, and they lived and breathed volleyball. And those volleyball girls, whether it was boys or girls, they kind of took my kids under their wing as well, because we'd have to travel to tournaments, or maybe if we were hosting tournaments. So she grew up in a gym, as did I, and that kind of got her passion instilled. And then I think she was an early developer, and my husband's quite a tall, large man, so she had that size to her really young. She was playing hockey, she was on the provincial basketball team and volleyball team, and kind of got ID because of her size, and then just stuck with it. And she eventually had to choose, which is unfortunate. I love when athletes are multiple, multi athletes. But by grade 10, she chose volleyball, and has never looked back.

Dick DeRyk

You mentioned she was in grade four, she was one of the tallest kids in in the class, and we all know that, you know, in school, the tall kids either play volleyball or basketball, right? It really doesn't matter how good or how awkward they are, they get they get recruited for that. What was her specialty on the team?

Deane Martin

She's a jumper. She's like my husband, not like me. She's offended that I'm short because I probably hampered her height a little bit, and it's my fault, of course. She's always been an outside hitter. She's a big, strong girl. She's about 5' 10" so she's a little undersized, now, for, you know, the elite level that she plays at. She's played on the national team for three years now at different age groups, and she's always swung. She was fortunate to be selected to the National Excellence team, which trains for four months out of Richmond, BC, at the Olympic Oval for two semesters. So she's missed her grade 11 fall semester and her grade 12 fall semester, by her choice. She wants to be training there. This year they selected her as a lib, so she switched over from swinging, hitting outside pin, and she did really, really well. She found lots of success as a lib, and that's where they see her if she is to make the next level at the senior national team, but she will definitely swing at university level.

Dick DeRyk

Tell me what a lib is, because there'll be people that don't know.

Deane Martin

A lib is a back row specialist. In the States, they're allowed to serve. In Canada, they are not. So it depends where you're playing. On the world stage they also don't serve, but they go in for, usually they take out the middle, because middles are those tall, gangly ones that aren't super back row passers. So Sara has a real back row presence. And here in Canada, at the university level, she'll be swinging, and she's a jumper. She's got at NEP (National Excellence Program), which is the strongest athletes in Canada, she has the highest vertical in Canada. That doesn't mean the highest jump touch. That means the highest vertical, because, of course, some of those middles can touch higher than her. So she's really worked on her on her vertical and her jumping, and she's a fantastic hitter; she's a really nice player to watch.

Grade four, she started Husky club. We were terrible, I think we won one match the whole season, and we had tons of fun and laughed at the girls, and hopefully with the girls a little bit. That was triple ball season. I'm a huge fan. I'm not sure if you're aware of what Triple Ball what Triple Ball is, but in Saskatchewan High School Athletics, SHA as well as club volleyball, Youth 13 plays Triple Ball, so it's a lot of passing and not just serving back and forth. Because no one's learning anything with that. And I think that's why maybe she's just, she's such a strong passer, is because she played Triple Ball for three years, because she started in that grade four, grade five, grade six, which is all Triple Ball, grade six on with our Husky club, we won gold in tier one provincials, and we've never looked back since. So she's been very, very fortunate. Covid put a little wrench in her. U15 year, I think, was the only year that provincials didn't go on, but every other year she's been very, played with really strong players and has beautiful teammates to help support her, and we've won gold there every year.

We've been fortunate to be able to travel a lot. We've gone to Denver and Washington, Vegas, and we've placed top 10 in the open tier, which is the top tier of every single tournament. We were just in Vancouver, they're the best of the West, and we were fortunate and took that gold home, and we opened the season with a PANDA gold medal, and next weekend we're heading to Washington so we really hope for some big things. And winning isn't everything, but I think pushing yourself and getting better and playing with strong teammates is important. She's just been really fortunate to play on some strong teams. And of course, in grade nine, she tried out for U17 Team Canada. She was encouraged to try out for that, and she made it, and was found some success at some Canada Cups. Last year she was very fortunate to play in the World Championships in Hungary and Croatia, and my husband and I were really fortunate to be able to go and watch her. And it's it's pretty darn cool seeing your kid play under the flag when they play O Canada, and you see your kid out there, that was something special.

Dick DeRyk

You've done a lot of coaching over the years. What is it like for either the daughter or the mother to have that kind of coach/player relationship? How does that work?

Deane Martin

I think it could go either way. My daughter and I are very close. In our case. It helps that she's a really strong player, because you don't have to defend her starting position, which she often is, on the court as a starter. So that's really helped, but it also has allowed us to travel together and share and experience many things. I also think it's important, as a female phys-ed teacher, I'm a huge advocate for keeping females in sport. So many drop out at that 14/15, age. So I have studied really hard, and I went and got my certifications, and I have my advanced certification so I can coach at the U 18 level. And I think it's important for my daughter to see that, and she wants to get into coaching and give back. She does lots of camps and runs lots and gives back to the community, and I think it's important for her to see how important it is to keep females in sport, and how important sport is in our youths life, and how much it has to offer.

Dick DeRyk

Rob Pasishnik, his two brothers and sister all played basketball and volleyball as they grew up in Yorkton, with Rob ending up on Dennis Pomeroy's high school and club teams in the 1980s. He has had a career in sales for the past 34 years, but was never very far from the volleyball court, coaching teams in Saskatoon. He was a member of the 1987-88 University of Saskatchewan Huskies, which won the CIAU Men's Volleyball Championship against the number one ranked University of Manitoba Bisons. That's the national championship.

His fellow team members included other familiar names, Mark Stebner, Brad Serjik, Darren Teneyckye, Brian Gavlas, and Dion Pfeifer. He was recognized by Sask Volleyball as the developmental Coach of the Year in 2011 and as the male performance coach the next year, when he was with the Saskatoon JCVC Volleyball Club, which has teams for males and females from under age 13, to 18. He and his wife Lisa have three children, all of whom played volleyball and other sports. The oldest and youngest still play volleyball. Rob is nearing the end of his involvement in coaching, and expresses some disillusionment with the direction the sport has taken for young players, as we talked about. What made those teams so good?

Rob Pasishnik

Dennis Pomeroy was one of the biggest attributes to why we were so successful. I think he, he learned the game when he was back in university, and he just wanted to increase the awareness in in Yorkton. So I know when I started playing, I was more of a basketball player, and until Dennis came around, and he really started getting me to look at volleyball, this is something that I can, you know, maybe pursue in the future, some someplace down the road. So I think just what he did, and with all the different players we had, I think just made everybody a better player and better team wise.

Dick DeRyk

He didn't look like a coach.

Rob Pasishnik

No, he didn't. So he, he knew what he was doing, and he kind of helped everybody get along. We felt like we're a family. Everybody worked hard and we had we had goals in mind too. So I think that's what helped us get where we were.

Dick DeRyk

Did you have any inkling at that time that coaching might be something you'd be interested in, or did that come later?

Rob Pasishnik

I think it did a little bit. Because I know I did coach with Dennis the one year I just came back home from school, and he had me be an assistant coach with him. And so I got an idea like, you know, this might be something that I could do when I get older.

Dick DeRyk

What's your coaching style? Some coaches just they sit back and let things happen. Others are, you know, up and down the sideline and waving and

Rob Pasishnik

Yeah, back then we couldn't stand up. We had to sit on the bench, or you had to sit down. We couldn't stand up to coach, unless we're calling a timeout. Today, they can run up and down the sideline. They can coach as much as they want. They can encourage, they can give directions. Even when I was, the last 10 years coaching, I don't think I stood up a lot. I would say 75%, 80%, I was still sitting on the bench, because that's the way I coached, and that's the way I grew up coaching.

Dick DeRyk

When did you start coaching on a more full time basis?

Rob Pasishnik

Helping out with Dennis, High School, and then, but club wise, I would say, yeah, it was in Saskatoon. I was helping out with the girls team way back in the 80s, late 80s, and then I got coaching a great 10 or a midget; they called it classification midget back then. Boys team, probably in the 90s. Then when my kids got older, that's why I really got full time with them. High school, I was staying in Saskatoon here, I was helped coach in Mont Royal and when I was coaching Monroe for three years, the third year coaching high school there, we ended up winning provincials Which ended the nine year streak of Yorkton winning nine years in a row. I also coached club girls and boys from like 14 all the way to 18 youth. I also helped assistant coach

with the Men's and Women's University team. I'm coaching a girls team right now, helping out right now. This is our third year with them, and this will probably be my last year coaching club.

Dick DeRyk

Why? Why is that?

Rob Pasishnik

Let's just say a lot of the politics that's happening in the sport, I think it's getting close to like what hockey is being. There's a lot of parent involvement. There's a lot of politics in, say, provincial team aspects. Some of the coaches that are coaching club are also coaching provincial team, and they tend to get the better players, which then draws a lot of those players from the smaller communities and moving them to the bigger centers. There's a couple girls that moved from from smaller cities, smaller towns, and they're playing in Saskatoon here. So they're they moved three to four hours away. Some of the girls now are, are also traveling three to four hours just to play on a better team. Why are they playing on a better team? Are they getting the skill development, or are they getting just winning? That's the question to ask themselves.

Some of the smaller towns are losing their better players. They're not helping out with the other players that, are in that centres. So I think that's mainly a reason why some of our skill development from coaches to the players is getting less and less right now, volleyball Canada is also having specialized women. If they want to play national team, they can also go to Richmond to, they can take their schooling in Richmond, but they also practice volleyball, so that's during our high school season. The guys would go to Gatineau, Quebec. Don't we have enough good coaches in the province, in all our provinces to do that, and you're also taken away from your high school experience. The team I help coach, we're kind of lucky. We got seven coaches.

Dick DeRyk

Seven?

Rob Pasishnik

Seven coaches, the ratio of coaches to players. You know, we got one coach that will look after two players, so they're getting a lot of skill development. And that's the benefit of having more coaches versus one or two coaches. Everybody gets taught and gets skill development. Brian Gavlas is one of those coaches, that's that we're coaching together.

Dick DeRyk

From what I read, and I don't know if this is your experience, it is attracting more kids. It's a growing sport.

Rob Pasishnik

I would say definitely, because I know back in the 80s, when we went to club provincials, there's three teams, and it was only two divisions, either you played grade 9/10, which was classified midget, or grade 11 and 12, that was classified juvenile. And I know my grade 10 year, for example, we had three teams at provincials for midget and three teams for juvenile. And I think today, every age 13/14, all the way to 18, will have a minimum for like 18, you and 17, you probably have about 15, 18, teams each. (Age) 13, you probably have 25 so you know six teams during the year, you're probably having close to 200 teams just for boys, will be way more than that.

Dick DeRyk

That Yorkton would have produced two internationally recognized and acclaimed volleyball referees and officiating organizers is quite remarkable. Following on the heels of coach and mentor, Don Pfeifer, Scott Borys received Volleyball Canada's referee lifetime award in 2020, followed by his induction into the Sask Volleyball Hall of Fame in 2024. Scott started reffing in 1981 in Yorkton, while he was still also a young player and progressed through the levels and. Attaining his international level in 2007. He officiated in the USA at international tournaments, and in Canada, refereed at 14 college and university National Championships. He took on administrative roles with Provincial and National programs, and in Saskatchewan, served as a Regional Officials Chairperson for seven years, the level three and four coordinator for over 10 years, a referee committee member for 37 years, and an executive member of that committee since 2000. Nationally he was the National Officials Chairperson from 2012 to 2020 and is back in that role as of 2023. He has been chair and member of a number of Volleyball Canada committees going back to the 1990s, and was the Referee Supervisor at a further 18 University National Championships. He and his wife, Angele, have two grown sons. Do they play volleyball? No, Scott says. They like sports that are a little more physical. They are rugby players

Scott Borys

In Yorkton, we had that saying, especially once we got to high school with Dennis, that if you played volleyball for Dennis, you refereed volleyball for Dennis. Because at the time Dennis was the, we called it the ROC so the Regional Officials Chair for Saskatchewan. We were also fortunate that Don Pfeifer was the National Officials Chair for Volleyball Canada back then. So we, you know, we had two really strong people on the officiating side who were always looking to get more people involved in it. I remember meeting Dennis, I think, for the first time. It was actually in 1980 when I was still at St Joe's Junior High, and I was referring and nobody else wanted to go on the stand and referee our Junior Girls game. So I said, "What the heck? I'll go up." Basically just blew the whistle every time the ball needed to be served. And ball went out or landed in. I didn't do much else. And Dennis made a comment after. He goes, "You know, you looked pretty good up there. When you get to high school next year, you know, come out and we'll get you referring as well." And I said, "Well, we'll see once we get there." I had no idea who Dennis was at the time, and, you know, later found out who he was and his involvement in refereeing in the province. So,

yeah, it's, it started, started early, and it's carried on. So I've just finishing my 44th year as a registered referee, and you know, for Saskatchewan in Canada.

Dick DeRyk

Did you continue playing, as well, after high school?

Scott Borys

I played two years at U of R on the Cougar and Men's Volleyball Team would have been 86-87. 87-88 I blew my ankle out pretty bad, and had surgery at the end of the second year. And then I said after that, okay, I'm done playing. And I was still refereeing all through that season, just not University. I was doing everything else, club and age class, so, and then just carried on from there. Back in the 90s, when Dennis took over as the Chair for the NOC for Canada, I took over as ROC in the province for a few years, and then gave it up for a few years, and then came back in. And it does consume a lot of time, you know, back then it was probably, you know, 15-20, hours every week, plus you're refereeing on weekends. And when you're in charge and you can't find people to go do stuff, you end up having to do it, as you know, any of the ROC's know now, and they're trying to get people to go and assign them to matches, they end up having to do it at the end of the days.

Dick DeRyk

What is it about refereeing versus playing that attracted you to that side of it.

Scott Borys

Like I said, I played two years at U of R, probably only because we didn't have enough talented players. You know, I wasn't one of the best players out there, but I worked hard, and at my height, 5'10", it wasn't anything that was going to be a long term career for me. I enjoyed the refereeing side just as much as the playing side. And I knew I would be, you know, able to stay with the game a lot longer as a referee than a player. Played a little bit of senior men's back in the early 90s, and then, you know, enjoyed that, but refereeing just seemed to be the calling that kept me involved in the sport. I officially hung up the whistle. I refereed my last matches at U of R in February '24 I was not waiting for somebody to tell me it was time for me to hang the whistle up. Talked with Lori Banga, was our ROC last year, and, you know, we had talked, and I said, "Okay, I'm done. I'm still going to be involved in mentoring and coaching, you know, referees, and help out in the province when I can." But my last matches were at U of R in February '24, so it was, it was a bittersweet moment, because I'd been refereeing there since, you know, '85, so 39 plus years of doing University Volleyball.

Dick DeRyk

How many volleyball referees would there be in the province?

Scott Borys

We probably have, I think this year we're in that four to five hundred range overall, you know, from the grassroots for level, our level ones and novices all the way up to our, you know, our handful of national referees that we have.

Dick DeRyk

So if a young player, as you were back in '81, '82, wants to get into refereeing. What's the process?

Scott Borys

We run clinics. We run clinics at all the high school districts every year, and invite you know, players and coaches to come out to learn about the rules, you know, that may change for that particular season. And sometimes we luck out and get some of the younger players that maybe are, you know, were like me. They weren't a starter, and they weren't going to carry on as a player for a long time, and enjoyed, you know, enjoyed refereeing, and you still get to be a part of the sport. And I think that a lot of us that have been around for a number of years, that's why we're still doing it. We love the sport. We love, you know, seeing all our friends. You know, we call it our volleyball family. We have Edmonton Nationals in May of this year, and I'm going to see probably 200 volleyball friends at that event, if not more,

Dick DeRyk

When the Macs, both the juvenile the midget teams, did very well in '82, Yorkton was known as, pretty much as a hotbed of volleyball. Is it still as big at the high school and club level today as it was back then?

Scott Borys

Volleyball is growing across the country and in Saskatchewan. This weekend in Regina, Sask Volleyball was hosting a Sask Cup here. They just recently bought some sport courts and are using the International Trade Center. That just shows the magnitude of the growth in volleyball. I'm currently the chair of the referee committee for Canada, again, and talking with the executive directors from all the PTAs across the country, it's 25, 30% growth in the athletes, and we're seeing, you know, 10% growth in the referees year over year. So we have a ways to go to catch up, but the sport is just expanding dramatically, which is a good thing, so.

Dick DeRyk

Lori-Ann Mundt excelled at a number of sports, including basketball and fastball, but at an early age made volleyball her sport of choice. She started at Yorkdale junior high and made it to the highest level possible, the Canadian National Team and the Olympic Games. She played on school teams, Yorkdale Junior High School Royals, and Yorkton Regional High School Raiders. She played on Saskatchewan provincial teams at the Midget, Juvenile, and Summer Games levels, and at the University of Regina on the Junior and Senior Lady Cougars. Along the way, she was Player of the Year, Most Valuable Player and an All Star 10 times between 1986 and 1990. She

represented Canada at three World Cup Championships, two Pan Am Games, two World Student Games, and the 1996 Olympic Games. She won bronze at the Pan American Games in 1995 and she was a member of the team that won gold at the 1989 Canada Games. Coaches and teammates recognized her leadership and named her captain of almost every team she played on. After an active playing career, she became a successful civilian coach with the Armed Forces National Volleyball Program, coaching women's teams, mainly in Winnipeg, where she still lives and now works at Deer Lodge, a large rehabilitation and long term care facility for adults with complex needs. What drove your success? What makes for a successful volleyball player at any level?

Lori-Ann Mundt

You can't be successful in anything without the help of others. And right from the get go, when I first started playing volleyball, Yorkton has, was blessed with many great volleyball coaches, and so I had good teachers, good mentors. I had positive atmosphere to work in and to train and to learn. I had great teammates throughout my, you know, junior high, high school, university, you name it, that would push me, encourage me. You know, you can't be successful without those, those people you know, in your corner and helping you out. And then you have to have, you know, self motivation and determination. And I mean, I had a dream, I had a goal, and my goal was, my dream was go the Olympic Games. Did I know that I could get there one day? Absolutely not. But I love the sport. And doors were opening. The more I worked, another door opened, and then another opportunity came. So I just kept on working, you know, as hard as I could. And not realizing that that would one day get me to the Olympic Games. It was just I was just following the path, and still had the dream in mind, but just kind of following the path.

Dick DeRyk

In Yorkton at the time, it seems to me that boy's volleyball, young men's volleyball, was more prominent than women's volleyball or girl's volleyball at the school level. But obviously at the school level, the girls were successful as well.

Lori-Ann Mundt

Oh yeah, we were super competitive. I mean, the boys won a lot of championships. We had, we had the team, we had the athletes to do it, but we always felt just a little bit short. We were always competitive. We won a lot of tournaments throughout the year, and then when it came to provincials, we just fell a little short, and... but we were, we were competitive my entire career, junior high and high school, we were a team to look out for, for sure, but the men and the boys, they were, yeah, they were definitely very competitive.

Dick DeRyk

The first coach you had was Dave Barron.

Lori-Ann Mundt

Yep.

Dick DeRyk

Were you a member of the Blitz, of the Club Team as well? Or was...

Lori-Ann Mundt

Yeah. So I had Dave Baron and Nancy Tamblyn for club and then Randy Schuster in high school.

Dick DeRyk

You went on from there coaching volleyball in the armed forces. How did that come about? At what point did you get into that?

Lori-Ann Mundt

Yeah, it was out of the blue, for sure. When I was playing on the national team, when we were based here in Winnipeg, a teammate in my of mine and I were asked to go to the volleyball camp that the military national teams were hosting here in Winnipeg at the base, and they want us, wanted us to participate in this camp, and so we did. And then, just prior to me retiring, the master warrant officer that I had met back in 1994, he had said, "What are you doing after volleyball?" And I said, "Most likely coming back to Saskatchewan, finishing my degree, moving on from there." He said, "I've got a job for you at the military base." And I was like, "Oh, okay." And it was right in line kind of what I was studying in university. So I was studying fitness and lifestyles, which is now they call kinesiology. So I became a gymnasium supervisor first when I went to work at the base, and then the military was downsizing at the time, and they got rid of the paritrade (?) is what they called them. So the people that taught phys ed, physical education and did all the fitness testing and programming, and so they brought in a civilian organization, which then I became the fitness coordinator at 17 Wing, and I had staff working with me, and so we were running all the fitness programs, doing all the fitness testing of the different units and stuff. And then I got involved with the volleyball programs there. So I coached the Men's Army Volleyball Team for a few years. I coached the Men's 17 Wing Air Force Team for one year, and then they have national programs, which are called CISM, and so I got involved with the CISM program as an assistant coach, and then slowly moved into the head coaching position, and I had coached there for about seven and a half years as the head coach for the CISM team. Started working in September of 1996 and then started coaching a little bit. Think it was 97-98 and then I became head coach in '99. I was at the base for 12 and a half years.

Dick DeRyk

Is it different coaching military people?

Lori-Ann Mundt

It was fascinating because, you know, you see them in their work uniform as Corporals to Sergeants to Master Horn Officers. But when they come into the gym, they're just Francis or Cher or whoever it is, you know. So it's fascinating to see them, you know, go through their work and then working with them in the gym. But with the military, too, they have a World Military games every four years, which is like their Olympic Games. So we participated in two of those. So when you go to the opening ceremonies in those games, all of the countries are wearing their military uniforms and they're marching in. So it's a sight like you've never seen before, and you have Generals and Brigadier Generals and you name it. So it's quite it was quite fascinating and humbling to be with, with all of those countries and all of these amazing athletes. As athletes, they're very disciplined, right? And they know how to time manage and very serious you know about their training and stuff. So it was a great experience.

I had some really great athlete their priority is their military job, and then volleyball is secondary, right? So we don't have these international, national team players that are playing on this CISM program. We have maybe college level athletes, and they're spread all across, across, you know, our country, at different bases. So I would travel to different bases, doing different volleyball camps, choosing the athletes, working with the athletes, and then being, you know, fortunate enough to go to some of these world championships and World Military games. Yeah, it was quite an experience. We didn't win too many matches, but that's okay. It's not about winning, and it's about experience. And I'll tell you one story that always is dear to my heart, and it's, I just I love these, these athletes. This is probably one of the best coaching experiences I've had.

We didn't win, but it was the best, one of the best that I've had. We were, we scouted China, and we did our the following day, we did some, you know, prep for it, and hours before the match, my players, kind of one by one, are coming to me and saying, "I don't think I can play. I don't think I can play." Like I, they were so nervous to go up against this team because they were running their offense was like, national team level offense, and they just didn't think that they could compete. And so after hearing this from a few of my players and my starters, I called a little team meeting, and we just kind of sat down and we talked about some stuff, and I said, guys, all I want you to think about is one thing at a time. I said, "If you can touch the ball, then you've done your job. If you can reject the ball on a block, then you've done your job. Then if you can reject it, then I think, that I believe in you, that you can block it." So I just kind of did little baby steps like that. And our first game, we lost three straight. But our first game, I remember watching them, and sure enough, a couple of our players, they got a touch, and they looked at me as if, like, "Oh my god, I got a touch!" And I'm like, "Yes!" And I was just so proud of my athletes, because they didn't believe that they could do it, but they just took the little steps, and they got just a little touch, then they got a block, then they got a ding, then they got a kill, then they got this, then they wiped off the hands, and they were just and every time they looked at me at the bench, and they go, (gasp sound) and I go, yes, that's awesome, right? And we were just in everybody was in it. The bench was in it. They

were cheering and screaming and yelling, and it was just, it was one of the best matches I've ever coached in my career. And I'll never forget that.

Dick DeRyk

Are you still involved in volleyball?

Lori-Ann Mundt

I'm involved a little bit. I was doing some coaching with a club team here. My best friend, her daughter, plays volleyball, so we were coaching her. This year I'm not coaching on a team, but I am like a technical coach for all of the teams within the club. So I, I'm kind of going to teach practice once a week just to work with the coaches, work with the athletes, help them out in any way that I can, share information. However I can help them. I'm there for them.

Dick DeRyk

The common denominator throughout these recollections of the Yorkton Volleyball Factory is Dennis Pomeroy, who died in Regina in February of 2017 at the age of 69. He was a teacher for 31 years, teaching in Hodgeville, Foam Lake, and Yorkton. On his retirement in 2000 he moved to Regina, and a year before his death, was inducted into the Sask Volleyball Hall of Fame. He was posthumously inducted into the Volleyball Canada Hall of Fame as an official. He was also a long time curling coach, and was on the board of the Saskatchewan Curling Association, Now Curl Sask, for 12 years, including as President in 1997 and 1998.

He was an active member of the committee that oversaw the amalgamation of the Men's and Women's curling associations in 1998. Bernadette McIntyre, now Saskatchewan's Lieutenant Governor, served with Dennis on the curling board. "Volleyball was his first love," she has said, "but curling wasn't far behind." Pomeroy was involved in volleyball in Saskatchewan for 47 years, and was Sask Volleyball's executive director from 2002 to 2007 where he was credited with restoring the financial well being of the organization, and he was a referee manager for international beach volleyball. He is remembered provincially and nationally for being the head of officials for volleyball Canada for 10 years, starting in 1995, setting up an officiating program that significantly improved the quality of officiating across the country.

All that being said, here in Yorkton, Dennis Pomeroy is remembered as the engine that powered the local volleyball scene back in the 1980s, and the love of the game that he inspired in many.

Dick DeRyk

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