

## Les Robbins

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**From:** Lincoln Arneal <larneal@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Monday, November 25, 2024 12:22 PM  
**To:** Patricia Sullivan  
**Cc:** Cheryl Nolte Henry; Denise Stange Omsted; Ann Garrett Zespy; Vicki Ostrander  
Highstreet; Les Robbins  
**Subject:** Re: 1974 Nebraska Volleyball Team

Thanks for sharing, Pat. The most annoying part of this is the last sentence, where they "consider the matter close." Even with a different administration, they refused to engage in dialogue with anyone outside the athletic department. They just huddled up with their people, said this is how it's always been done and then decided to stick with the status quo.

It's frustrating that they failed to pick up the phone and have a conversation, especially with you, who was there, about what it was like back then. They rely on some decision made by someone (my guess is Barb Hibner) and stick with that decision because it requires the least work on their end. As someone who has put in the work and talked to Aleen Swofford, who agrees that 1974-75 should be the start of the history books, not reaching out for any conversation is lazy.

The good news is that I have continued researching and have talked to more than 20 athletes and coaches from that era. I'm working on several articles about other teams, including swimming and diving, gymnastics and field hockey. After the volleyball season, I hope to finish these and have something to share that outlines why 1974 is the correct official start of women's athletics at Nebraska.

Lincoln

On Sat, Nov 23, 2024 at 9:38 AM Patricia Sullivan <[patsullivanvt@gmail.com](mailto:patsullivanvt@gmail.com)> wrote:

Just want to be sure you all have been able to see my email to you, my response to Kristen Brown and Kristen's response to me. I'll resend the messages individually if you haven't seen them all.

Best,  
Pat

On Fri, Nov 22, 2024 at 10:18 AM Patricia Sullivan <[patsullivanvt@gmail.com](mailto:patsullivanvt@gmail.com)> wrote:

I received a response to my email to Kristen Brown a couple days ago. Her message, as well as my final message, are below. Let me know if you can't access them for some reason.

Kristen has seen Cheryl's scholarship letter, read my comments and listened to our pleas. At some point probably more than 40 years ago when the first media guides were being produced for all women's teams at Nebraska and when Nebraska volleyball was really beginning to be on the national radar screen, some athletic department group made the decision to call 1975 the first year of women's athletics because of the hiring of Aleen Swofford and June Davis. As we've said before, the early '70's were murky years in women's athletics all over the country.

When I look at the picture of the 1974 team it makes so much sense, for so many legitimate reasons, that 1974 be recognized as the first year of women's volleyball. From an administrative standpoint Nebraska could have made the case for beginning different women's sports in different years. But I can completely understand why they would have chosen 1975. Of course, I can also make solid case for "righting a wrong".

In any case, my friends, I hope you will always remember your senior year as an amazing volleyball experience. What a season! You have left a striking legacy for so many women who have followed in your footsteps. I'm so proud of you!

All the best,

Pat

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Patricia Sullivan** <[patullivanvt@gmail.com](mailto:patullivanvt@gmail.com)>

Date: Fri, Nov 22, 2024 at 10:00 AM

Subject: Re: 1974 Nebraska Volleyball Team

To: Kristen Brown <[kbrown@huskers.com](mailto:kbrown@huskers.com)>

CC: Mitzi Lenz <[mlenz@huskers.com](mailto:mlenz@huskers.com)>

Kristen,

Thank you for your timely response. I appreciate and understand the discussions that have taken place within Nebraska's athletic department regarding the first years of Nebraska volleyball. In the early 1970's colleges and universities all over the country made sometimes difficult decisions regarding initial varsity athletic dates for women in challenging, somewhat arbitrary but not capricious ways. It is entirely understandable, from an administrative perspective, that Nebraska would have chosen 1975 as a starting point. That's when the first women's athletic director and first sports information director were hired. A different decision could have been made from a student-athlete perspective using the points we have already listed: scholarships, supervision from the athletic department, and so on.



Last week, at the Indiana game, the current Nebraska team wore what's now called their "throwback" jerseys - the ones modeled after the 1974 jerseys. Four women in the picture - Cheryl Nolte Henry, Denise Stange, Ann Garrett Zespy and Vicki Ossenkop Highstreet - were seniors in that year. All other players were able to move on and receive their varsity letters beginning in 1975. My hope, as you close this matter, is that those four women can be recognized as varsity athletes by receiving their varsity letters, having their names acknowledged on the volleyball letterwinners board, and full recognition of N Club members.

Again, thank you for your attention to this matter. Those first years of Nebraska volleyball were so important to the ultimate development of the program and even more important to the women who clearly paved the way.

All the best,  
Pat Sullivan

On Wed, Nov 20, 2024 at 9:58 AM Kristen Brown <[kbrown@huskers.com](mailto:kbrown@huskers.com)> wrote:

Pat,

Thank you for your email as well as the welcome to the University of Nebraska! The last four months have flown by, but it has been a wonderful transition to Lincoln, the university and athletics department!

I appreciate the background information you provided. It is my understanding this issue has been discussed at great length over the years and especially the last 2 years in light of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Title IX. I have had the opportunity to review information provided to the department by Les Robbins. I have seen a series of emails sent to your group by my predecessor. I have also discussed this with several individuals familiar with the decisions that were made by previous athletic administrations here to uphold the original determination of the 1975-76 academic year being the first varsity season for women's athletics at Nebraska.

We have discussed this as the current athletics leadership team and will maintain that decision. I hear your point about the women's basketball media guide listing the 1974-75 record, and to be frank, there is no legitimate rationale as to why it has been included other than that is what each women's basketball sports information director inherited when they stepped into their role. That being said, the women's basketball webpage/media guide does specifically note that the first full Varsity season was 1975-76. It should also be noted that even though the webpage/media guide lists the 1974-75 team record, no varsity letters were given in women's basketball or in any women's sport prior to 1975-76.

For what it is worth – and what we believe likely happened here – many institutions across the country had a transition period from the time Title IX legislation was passed until the first official season of women's varsity athletics was declared. In that interim time period, scholarships may have been given by the university/athletics department, competition may have taken place, and programs may very well have been under the supervision of the athletics department; however, those programs were not designated as varsity sports quite yet. For those of us on the leadership team, including myself, who have worked at other institutions, this is consistent with how varsity women's athletics was phased in at other places.

Again, thank you for sharing this information. We are grateful for you and your former players' contributions to the University of Nebraska and for the foundation that was laid for this program to be what it is today. We consider this matter closed.

Best,

Kristen



**Kristen D**  
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**From:** Patricia Sullivan <[patsullivanvt@gmail.com](mailto:patsullivanvt@gmail.com)>  
**Date:** Monday, November 18, 2024 at 6:59 PM  
**To:** Kristen Brown <[kbrown@huskers.com](mailto:kbrown@huskers.com)>  
**Subject:** 1974 Nebraska Volleyball Team

**Caution:** Non-NU Email

Good evening, Kristen. A belated welcome to the University of Nebraska and Nebraska Volleyball. As the first volleyball coach at Nebraska, I'd like to share some background information.

The University of Nebraska's volleyball media guide lists 1975-76 as the first year of women's volleyball. This year's celebration of 50 years of Husker women's volleyball should legitimately have celebrated 51 years. The University of Nebraska's 1974 volleyball team should be included in the athletic department records. This is a matter of concern in terms of historical accuracy and it is a matter of concern for those women who participated on the team during the 1974-75 academic year. Acknowledging their participation as letterwinners and affording them the recognition they deserve by correcting the record books is a reasonable solution.

The inception of Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972 spurred on discussions regarding women's athletics at the University of Nebraska. Beginning in the fall of 1974 the volleyball team functioned under the direct supervision of the University's athletic department, with scholarships having been awarded to student-athletes and a coach reporting to the athletic director (Bob Devaney). As the coach of that team, in the late summer of 1974 (the beginning of the 1974 season) I was asked to provide a list of current volleyball team members who should be awarded athletic scholarships beginning in the fall of 1974. Those scholarships were awarded for the 1974-75 academic year. Cheryl Nolte Henry ('75) has her original letter from the University stating that 1974 was the first year for scholarships for women's athletics and that her check was available for pickup. I do not believe the University would have awarded athletic financial aid to an unrecognized, non-varsity sport. Four women on that team, Cheryl Nolte, Vicki Ossenkop, Denise Stange and Ann Garrett should be recognized as letterwinners on a very successful 1974 team.

The first full-time athletic director for women was hired by the athletic department in the summer of 1975. At the same time a full-time women's sports information director was hired. However, the 1974 team, coach and season was under the direct supervision of Bob Devaney. The 1974 volleyball season record has been researched, completed and reported and it leaves no doubt that the varsity volleyball program existed in the fall of 1974. As a matter of support for women's sports being recognized in 1974-75, I refer to the women's basketball media guide where the first team of record was coached by Jan Callahan in 1974-75.

There is so much information to acknowledge and support the inclusion of the 1974 volleyball team as Nebraska's first. I was there. I cannot think of a logical reason why the 1974 season has not been recognized. I welcome a direct conversation about that first year. My number is 802-681-8921.

Patricia A. Sullivan, EdD

Nebraska Volleyball Coach

1974, 1975, 1976