

Beach Volleyball Making Waves in the NCAA

MONROE – Imagine a place with the sun on your face, wind blowing through your hair and the sand between your toes.

You would think you're at the beach right? Well, you might be, but you could also be at the ULM sand courts enjoying the weather and watching the NCAA's 90th Championship sport beach volleyball at the Bayou Bash this Friday and Saturday. ([click here for tournament schedule](#))

“It's such a different game. Because I've been playing indoor all my life, not that I was getting burned out of indoor, but it was a really nice refresher and a new way to see volleyball. I think that's why I was so drawn to it because I was still doing what I loved, but in a different setting,” said Delanie Driver, senior from Wichita Falls, Texas.

Beach volleyball has similar aspects to the indoor game as they are both scored by rally point. In rally point scoring it doesn't matter what team is serving the winner of the rally gets a point. However, the games are also very different.

“Beach is way more chill. You don't have to have shoes and knee pads and socks and if you forget something you have your jersey and yourself and that's really all you need,” said [Gabby Love](#), a freshman from Fort Worth, Texas.

For example, beach volleyball is played with two players on the court instead of six.

“It's just me and my partner. Like I didn't have to depend on a whole team and they didn't have to depend on me. If I could just get together with one person, we could dominate,” said [Holland Ponthieux](#), a freshman from West Monroe, La.

At the collegiate level there are five teams of two that compete to win the most matches. With only two people on the court the players do not have set positions and get a lot more touches than in the indoor game.

“The connection (with your teammate) is a lot stronger than when it's a whole team. As a whole team we are connected but when you're playing with just one person, it's just you guys out there,” said Hadley Swartz, a senior from York, Penn.

Each pair plays the best of three sets. The first two sets are played to 21 and the third set played to 15. The winning team must win by two points.

“Beach is much more of a shots game and more strategic. There's more elements that effects it like the wind and the sun, but you get to learn the ways of how to deal with it,” said Grace Convey, a freshman from Brisbane, Australia.

The elements also add another difference as the teams will play in most any weather (sun, wind, rain, overcast). What will halt play is when there is lightning present or there is a threat to any of the players. Because the weather is such a factor the teams switch sides every seven points during the first two sets and every five points in the third set to prevent giving any one team an overall advantage.

“Volleyball is already a complex sport and now that you add in the sun and the elements and all of the outside factors that could change at any moment. And that is probably what makes it so different from indoor,” said Driver.

According to the American Volleyball Coaches Association (AVCA), beach volleyball made the quickest transition from an emerging sport to a championship sport in NCAA history and is also the fastest growing NCAA sport over the last five years in Division I.

“A big thing is that everyone that plays it loves it. Even people who are not very good play and love it,” said Convey. “There are other sports that go out (to the sand courts) during the weekend and even in other countries families go out and they take a beach ball or different type of ball and they still try to play beach volleyball with it.”

Beach volleyball has been rumored to have started either in Santa Monica, Calif., in the 1920s or in Hawaii in 1915.

The sport got a boost in 1930 because of the depression. It became an activity that the whole family could play at little to no cost, according to the beach volleyball database.

“It's a big community connector and everyone that touches it loves it. You can be terrible and have no idea what you are doing but you're having fun and having a laugh,” said Convey. “I just think it's really cool how it's fun for people at the family/friend level and then at the professional level as well.”

In 1983 the Association of Volleyball Professionals (AVP) was formed to protect the players' interests and the integrity of the sport, according to the beach volleyball database.

Beach volleyball became a demonstration sport at the 1992 Olympics and was added as an official Olympic sport in 1996 in Atlanta, Ga. According to USA Volleyball there were 24 men's teams and 16 women's teams that represented their countries in the first year it was an Olympic sport.

From there the sport has only grown. The NCAA recognized beach volleyball as an emerging sport for women in Division I in August of 2011, with 15 DI institutions sponsoring varsity teams.

The sport was originally called sand volleyball, but to keep consistent with other levels of play throughout the world, the decision was made to call it beach volleyball, according to USA Volleyball.

The teams were first built with the crossover of indoor players taking to the sand, but as the sport grows there are more that are solely beach players. Five years after becoming an emerging sport there are 56 schools that field squads, 49 in DI, five in DII and two in DIII and still growing, according to the AVCA.

“You have to think so much (more than in indoor). You can't just rely on your athletic capabilities. You have to know what's going on, read the defense and its mind games. Once you can figure out the other team you can win even if they are bigger, stronger or more athletic,” said Ponthieux.

The spring of 2016 was the first year that beach volleyball was considered a championship sport where University of Southern California became the first NCAA title winner.

The ULM beach program started in 2013 and going into the 2017 season holds an overall record of 38-40 over the four-year time span.

“We're the luckiest people in the world. We get flown all over, to the most amazing places and just to be there in itself is incredible, but to also be able to

play the game that I love in the most beautiful places in the world is kind of surreal,” said Claire Crossfield, a senior from Calgary, Canada.

After the addition of three more courts in 2016 it opened the possibility of hosting a tournament.

It's going to be something that you've never seen before and in a way, your kind of watching history unfold...,” said Driver.