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## ***Extending our Reach Initiative***

### ***Report & Recommendations***

Submitted by Kenny Rogers,  
Director of Strategic Initiatives  
September 2018 (updated July 2019)

### **Introduction**

#### **I. About First Point Volleyball Foundation and Extending our Reach**

Founded in 2016 by Wade Garard and John Speraw, Head Coach of the USA Men's National Team and UCLA Men's Volleyball, First Point Volleyball Foundation exists to provide opportunities for young people to mature and develop through volleyball. Specifically focused on growing boys' and men's volleyball in the United States, First Point Volleyball Foundation initiates and celebrates FIRST POINTS whether that is a first point of a new NCAA team, or a new high school team, or a first point of competitive volleyball for a 12 year-old. First Point Volleyball has raised \$3.1 million in less than three years and has helped start 17 new collegiate men's volleyball programs. The Foundation has three strategic initiatives: (1) Growing collegiate opportunities; (2) Growing high school boys' opportunities; and (3) Extending our Reach Diversity Initiative – expanding volleyball opportunities to boys and men of color and growing diversity within the game. [www.firstpointvolleyball.com](http://www.firstpointvolleyball.com).

#### **II. The Current State of Diversity in Boys' and Men's Volleyball and Why it Matters**

##### ***Competitive volleyball in the United States is currently overwhelmingly female.***

About 450,000 young women play volleyball competitively in high school, compared to about 60,000 boys, and the number of women playing volleyball in college outpaces men in similar proportions. There are approximately 350 Division I Women's Volleyball teams and only 23 Division I Men's teams.

First Point Volleyball's leadership is thrilled to see that girls' and women's volleyball has become one of the top participation sports in the country and believes that growing the boys' and men's game will end up benefiting girls and women in volleyball by creating a bigger fan base for the women's game, more coaching and athletic

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administrator opportunities for women who are volleyball coaches, and greater sponsorship opportunities for women's volleyball programs.

***Competitive volleyball in the United States is also overwhelmingly white.*** Though overall statistics on race in competitive volleyball in the U.S. are not available, an espnW analysis of the NCAA database in 2012 noted that about 17% of women collegiate volleyball players in the U.S. are players of color. A review of Division I men's team rosters leads First Point Volleyball to estimate that approximately 10% of male collegiate volleyball players in the U.S. are players of color. First Point Volleyball Foundation further estimates that the numbers of players of color participating in club volleyball in the U.S. may be lower than 10%.

First Point Volleyball's leadership feel it is important to engage more boys' and men of color in competitive volleyball for the following reasons:

- For boys and young men of color, volleyball has the potential to teach important life lessons, as do all team sports. Among team sports, volleyball puts heightened value on the importance of communication and working together towards common goals.
- Competitive volleyball is a healthier and safer alternative to many other sports which have relatively high concussion rates such as football. Volleyball is also a sport that promotes lifelong health as people can play volleyball recreationally long after their college years.
- Competitive volleyball is an activity that can engage young boys and help them develop stronger connections to adults (coaches) fellow students (players) and their institutions of learning. It has the potential to help boys stay in school and graduate.
- For some, competitive volleyball can be a ticket to a college education and a more rewarding life. In economic terms, a college graduate - on average - earns \$1 million more over their lifetime than a high school drop-out.
- Boys and young men who are already playing competitive volleyball are missing out on getting the full value of participating in sports because volleyball is currently so lacking in diversity. Boys volleyball teams don't typically reflect the diversity of the country as a whole, or the future workforce that players are likely to enter.
- Lack of diversity poses marketing problems for the sport - the current lack of diversity in boys and men's volleyball presents several marketing problems :

first, it limits the pool of potential advertisers/sponsors for the sport, second it makes the sport less appealing in general for fans from communities of color, and third it makes the sport less appealing for many young boys (and their parents) when deciding what sports they want to play.

- Lack of diversity is a competitive disadvantage - having very limited representation from boys and young men of color in high school, club, and college volleyball in the U.S. means that our country's national team is missing out on a lot of potential talent.

### **III. First Point Volleyball Foundation Financial Context**

First Point Volleyball has raised more than \$3.1 million to date. It is working in partnership with USA Volleyball on several projects and has received significant support from the American Volleyball Coaches Association (AVCA). To date, the First Point Volleyball Foundation has made grant awards to 17 colleges and universities to help them add men's volleyball programs. First Point Volleyball's primary grant-making focus at this time is to add more Division I and Division II volleyball programs because teams in those divisions have the ability to provide student-athletes with scholarships. Additional grants to grow men's volleyball in Division III, or NAIA Institutions, or at the high school level, are being considered as donors step forward with specific philanthropic interest in those areas. First Point Volleyball is also committed to growing diversity within boys' and men's volleyball in the United States, but given its primary grant making focus is in Division I and Division II at present, First Point Volleyball will focus its efforts in growing diversity on low-cost or no-cost activities such as facilitating partnerships between other organizations that have their own sources of funding (such as Starlings, Boys and Girls Clubs and City Parks and Recreation Departments for example), and/or activities which First Point Volleyball can identify and attract dedicated philanthropic support from organizations and individuals specifically interested in extending opportunities to help boys and young men of color.

### **IV. Process for Information Gathering and Exploring Opportunities**

Over the past two years, First Point Volleyball's Director of Strategic Initiatives, Kenny Rogers has convened groups of volleyball experts in Chicago, Colorado Springs and Los Angeles, to discuss obstacles and constraints that are preventing more boys of color from playing competitive volleyball. These participants have also been asked to brainstorm potential recommendations for growing the game among boys and men of color. (For full list of participants in these Extending our Reach convenings please see participant list at end of report)

## **Findings to date**

Participants in the Extending our Reach convenings identified several issues that are preventing more boys of color from playing competitive volleyball. Among them: money; gender issues; dearth of role models; lack of a professional league in the U.S.; lack of support from coaches of other sports; culture; physical environment; lack of opportunity to play competitively in high school; Title IX issues; and Timing.

### **Money**

Club Volleyball - can be quite expensive for participants (\$1,000-\$4,000 per season in most cases). Expenses are so high in large part because most clubs have to rent gym time. Club volleyball engages about 20,000 boys a year across the country, and playing club volleyball has become a virtual prerequisite for earning a college volleyball scholarship.

Camps - camps at colleges and universities are also expensive. USA Volleyball puts on High Performance Volleyball Camps, but those are costly as well, as is travel to get to and from the camps.

Club basketball has less expensive alternatives than club volleyball. AAU membership fees are significantly less than club volleyball fees.

High School Volleyball - boys volleyball is a relatively inexpensive sport for high schools to administer, and very inexpensive for schools that already have girls volleyball, however, boys volleyball is still not sanctioned or financially supported in about 30 states in the United States.

### **Gender Issues**

Participants reported that volleyball is often viewed as a girls' sport, especially in African American and Latino communities.

Some discussion participants report that boys are not comfortable playing volleyball because they feel "the uniforms are too girly."

One mother of an African American boys volleyball player reported that she took her son on a trip to participate in a summer volleyball camp at a university only to find out it was a camp for girls (nowhere on the camp's website or materials did it mention that it was a girls' camp).

### **Dearth of Role Models of Color**

Several participants pointed to the dearth of African American and Latino role models in boys and men's volleyball as a limiting factor to growth.

“We are what we see,” said one club volleyball director.

Several African American discussion participants who had played volleyball in college said they were introduced to the sport by their fathers; they suggested that volleyball was a sport that often gets handed down from one generation to the next.

One discussion participant noted that men of color who go into volleyball coaching (and have the opportunity to be impactful role models and mentors) are often faced with the choice of staying on the boys/men’s side, or moving to the girls/women’s side where there is more money..

### **Lack of Professional League in U.S./dearth of exposure in television/social media**

Participants noted that a problem for growth of boys volleyball in general was the lack of media exposure the sport gets in the United States since there is currently no major professional volleyball league and collegiate volleyball gets little exposure. One participant bemoaned the fact that the Division I National Championship match this year between Long Beach St. and UCLA provided excellent drama for fans in attendance, but very few fans ended up seeing it on television. Boys of color, one participant postulated, tend to gravitate to sports they see on television like football and basketball, perhaps even more than the overall population does.

### **Lack of Accurate Information among Coaches of other boys’ sports regarding Multi-Sport Participation**

The trend in recent decades has been for coaches in youth sports to instruct athletes to specialize in one sport early on in their development to give them the best chance of success. This trend may be showing signs of slowing down or reversing, however, as elite athletes and sports researchers have become increasingly vocal about the benefits of playing multiple sports to performance, and injury prevention. Note: 29 of 32 first round picks in the 2018 NFL Draft played multiple sports in high school.

High School Basketball coaches - as a group - were called out by discussion participants as being unsupportive of their players participating in competitive volleyball as well as basketball, despite the sports having different seasons. Multiple discussion participants noted that many basketball coaches force athletes to make a choice between basketball and other sports, like volleyball.

According to one participant, many club and high school basketball coaches “sell the dream” of helping their players get NCAA basketball scholarships or NBA careers with little results.

## **Culture**

One discussion participant's father quit his team and dropped out of college after his first year, in part because it was difficult being the only African American on his college volleyball team.

One participant talked about how since the sport is lacking in diversity, club leadership - including club directors and coaches - are themselves often unattuned to issues boys of color may face in joining a new team due to race and/or income inequality. For example, going out to dinner at a club tournament can lead to awkwardness when players and families have different expectations of what and where team members should eat.

Another participant revealed the challenges he faced in joining a club team where he was not only a minority in terms of ethnicity, but also a minority in terms of experience having started playing the sport years after his teammates. Starting volleyball late - relative to his peers - exacerbated his feeling of being an outsider because he was at a disadvantage in terms of skill and training.

Another participant almost dropped out of volleyball because his father wanted him to play basketball and thought volleyball was a "sissy sport."

Multiple participants said the fact that football and basketball are so popular on television and in American popular culture leads to challenges in terms of attracting new players to the sport. Boys are often given basketballs or footballs for their birthdays or holiday gifts, but are rarely given volleyballs.

Several participants said both from firsthand experience and their observations that volleyball is often not the first sport boys try, but a sport boys try after they give up on another sport.

## **Physical Environment**

Several participants pointed to the physical environment that kids are exposed to in their communities to explain why volleyball has not become more popular than it is.

"When you walk into a gym you typically see six basketball rims, four on the sides and two the long way. Rarely do you see a volleyball net set up in a park or school gym, even if that gym does have a net, it's typically stored away in a closet."

## **Lack of Opportunity to Play Competitively in High School**

Boys High School Volleyball is currently played statewide in only 20 of 50 states. One discussion participant who has been a player, coach and leader in growing volleyball for decades said the current state of boys and men's volleyball reminds her of where

girls' and women's volleyball was 20-30 years ago. She said there are too many "dry pockets" around the country where boys volleyball is not being played at all, and those dry pockets are often in communities with high minority populations.

Of the top ten cities in the country with the largest African American populations, six of them do not have boys high school volleyball:  
Detroit, Houston, Memphis, Baltimore, Washington, D.C. and Dallas.

Of the top ten cities in the country with the highest percentage of African Americans, nine do not have boys high school volleyball:  
Detroit, Jackson, Birmingham, Baltimore, Memphis, New Orleans, Flint, Montgomery and Savannah.

Latinos have more access to boys high school volleyball than African Americans overall, but do not have access in three cities which are top ten in the country in terms of Latino population: Houston, Dallas-Fort Worth, and San Antonio.

Boys high school volleyball is typically more accessible for Asians and Asian Pacific Islanders in the United States than African Americans and Latinos, but target cities/areas to consider for participation growth from Asians and Asian Pacific Islanders would be Seattle, Northern Virginia and Boston.

### **Title IX and Perceived Title IX issues**

Extending our Reach discussion participants reported that Athletic Directors in high schools who were not interested in adding boys high school volleyball often pointed to Title IX as an excuse for not considering the idea, without actually knowing the impact that adding boys volleyball would have on the school's compliance with Title IX.

Participants were in favor of the growth that has occurred in girls and women's sports as a result of Title IX, and in favor of extending opportunity to girls who want to play high school sports, but many of these same participants had difficulty with the idea that boys who wanted to play high school sports were being denied that opportunity in schools where girls were not being turned away from participating.

### **Timing**

One discussant noted that boys of color are less likely to play club volleyball. Boys of color who do play volleyball typically start playing in high school and often start at a competitive disadvantage to many of their white counterparts. When boys are less successful than their peers at a new sport, it is harder to keep them engaged in that sport.

Tod Mattox, Executive Director of the Starlings Foundation shared that Starlings is venturing into a new program model in which they will be helping grow diversity in the sport of volleyball - for both girls and boys - by partnering with MSO's (multi-sport organizations like parks, YMCA's, Boys and Girls Clubs, etc.) and helping to facilitate well-run clinics for middle school students (boys and girls) that will expose them to the sport of volleyball in a fun, engaging and instructive way.

## **Recommendations/Investment Opportunities**

Based in large part on Extending our Reach participants' ideas on how to overcome obstacles to growing diversity within boys' and men's volleyball (and growing the boys' and men's game overall), First Point Volleyball Foundation is interested in engaging in discussions with potential partners and donors around the following recommendations:

### **RECOMMENDATION 1.**

**What:** Scholarships/Fee Waivers

**Potential Partner Organization/Funder:** USA Volleyball/USA Volleyball Foundation

1. We recommend that USA Volleyball (through its regional leadership) encourage volleyball club directors to develop a mechanism for providing scholarships to athletes who would help diversify the club demographically. We understand that club directors may not currently have the resources to offer even partial scholarships, so we recommend that USA Volleyball encourage club directors do one or more of the following to develop resources for scholarships and/or partial scholarships over time:
  - a. Develop an annual club fundraiser to raise money for a scholarship or scholarships (annual club fundraisers could be linked together in a national "super-fundraiser" that individual clubs have access to participate in, such as a raffle for a VIP trip to Tokyo to watch Olympic Volleyball)
  - b. Provide parents of players the *option* to make a contribution to the club's scholarship fund when signing their child up for club (for example, "check this box if you want to add \$100 to the club's scholarship fund")
  - c. Seek funding from local businesses or foundations to support their scholarship fund
2. We recommend that USA Volleyball develop a scholarship and fee waiver system for boys who tryout for USA Volleyball's High Performance teams and camps.
3. We recommend USA Volleyball develop a fee waiver system for a certain number of clubs each year that are able to demonstrate financial hardship, so

that those clubs are provided the opportunity to participate in USAV's Boys Junior National Tournament. We further recommend that USAV encourage its regions to develop a similar system for its qualifying events.

4. We recommend that USA Volleyball develop a way to positively recognize club directors who are taking exceptional steps to help grow the game for boys and young men of color.

## **RECOMMENDATION 2.**

**What:** Marketing Campaign targeted to boys of color

**Potential Partner Organization(s)/Funder:** Funding partner tbd, other partners would include USA Volleyball, Parks and Recreation Departments

1. We recommend that a marketing campaign be developed utilizing social media to promote the sport of volleyball specifically to boys and young men of color. Campaign would highlight elite men's volleyball players playing in college, and for the national team
2. We further recommend that this marketing campaign highlight the speed and power of the men's game in a compelling way so as to combat the perception among many boys of color that volleyball is a girl's game
3. A component of the marketing campaign must be connecting boys of color who are interested in pursuing volleyball with real opportunities to learn the game and play competitively, whether that be in high school, club, or in some other way.
4. Ideally, another component of the campaign would highlight a volleyball player who also plays basketball at a high level and who could demonstrate by example that having the athlete play and train for both sports enhances performance in each sport.
5. Partner with Parks and Recreation Departments - especially targeting parks and recreation departments serving boys of color - to show visuals from the campaign within their facilities

## **RECOMMENDATION 3.**

**What:** Cultural Awareness/Sensitivity Training for directors and coaches

**Potential Partner Organization(s)/Funder:** Funder tbd, recognition from USAV

1. Provide cultural awareness/sensitivity training to Club Directors and Coaches so that they can become more aware of issues of race and income within their clubs and teams, and suggest strategies and best practices for dealing with these issues
2. Provide recognition from USA Volleyball for director and coaches who participate in this training

## **RECOMMENDATION 4.**

**What:** Develop Outreach Campaign to State High School Athletic Associations and Individual School Districts encouraging them to sanction boys high school volleyball; develop clinics to “seed” demand for boys volleyball, especially in communities of color

**Potential Partner Organization(s)/Funder:** Starlings Foundation, Local foundations tbd, Parks and Recreation Departments

1. First Point Volleyball Foundation has a growing network of volunteers in place around the country who have the ability to engage high school athletic association leaders and school district leaders in conversations about boys volleyball.
2. We recommend that First Point Volleyball build relationships with leaders within these organizations to help position those organizations to consider adding boys volleyball at some point in the future.
3. We recommend that as a first step First Point Volleyball Foundation approach local foundations interested in sports, health, income-inequality, youth development, and/or after-school programming regarding funding clinics for middle school students to help “seed” demand for boys high school volleyball in general and especially in communities of color. Some clinics can be developed in partnership with Starlings Foundation and others can be modeled after the Extending our Reach Clinics that Don Gleason of Daemen College has helped administer and First Point Volleyball Foundation has helped fund in Buffalo, NY.
4. We recommend prioritizing Detroit, Houston, Dallas, Atlanta, Columbia, SC, and the Beltway area (Baltimore, Washington D.C., Northern Virginia) to pursue funding and partnerships for clinics.

## **Background Information**

### **Extending our Reach Convening Participants\***

**McQella Adams** coaches at The Colorado Springs School. She is a former volleyball player at Colorado College who works for the U.S. Olympic Committee on athletic safety. She previously worked with the U.S. Olympic Committee on Diversity and Inclusion.

**Chris Austin** is a volleyball player, coach and author. He has been an NCAA Champion as a player and National Champion as a Coach. Chris was the setter for U.C. Irvine's 2012 and 2013 National Championship teams under coach John Speraw, and has played professionally indoors and on the beach. Chris has coached high school and club and he won a national championship as a club coach in 2017.

**Daniel Becker** is a coordinator of coaching education at USA Volleyball and a director at Team CO Volleyball Club.

**Matt Burrell** is Founder and Executive Director of Elevation, VBC.

**Antoinette Cass** is a volleyball parent who has two children - one girl and one boy - who play club volleyball and want to continue playing volleyball in college. Antoinette is an elementary school principal in Los Angeles.

**Sharon Clark** is the Head Coach for Butler University's Women's Volleyball Team, and Chair of the AVCA Diversity Development Committee. She is the mother of a rising high school senior who plays boys club volleyball in Indiana and aspires to play men's volleyball in college.

**Sid Davidson** is the Head Coach of El Modena High School Boys Volleyball team in Orange, California. Sid is a former club volleyball director and coach, and an AVCA Diversity Development Committee award winner.

**Mike DeJager** is Coach at SkyView Academy in Highlands Ranch, Colorado.

**Miguel De La Rosa** is a lawyer, Head Coach of the University of Chicago Men's Volleyball team, and a coach at Sky High Club and High Performance in Chicago.

**Ray Gooden** is the Head Coach for Northern Illinois University's Women's Volleyball Team and a member of the AVCA Diversity Development Committee. Ray played volleyball at Ohio State and frequently announces games for USA volleyball.

**Jamion Hartley** is a former player at Ball State and on the Jamaican National Team.

**Trevon Jackson** is a recent high school graduate and has been a club and high school player in Chicagoland.

**Wendy Jones** is a former collegiate volleyball player and current volleyball mom. She has four children, three of whom play volleyball.

**John Kessel** is Director of Sport Development for USA Volleyball. He has been working to grow the game of volleyball at all levels for decades and is an internationally renowned former volleyball player, coach, and coaches' instructor. He is also a volleyball father.

**Djamal Lylecyrus**

Djamal will be a high school senior in the 2018/219 academic year. He plays volleyball for the Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies (his high school team) and West Volleyball Club.

**Tod Mattox** is Executive Director of Starlings Volleyball, a non-profit organization that has been promoting diversity in girls volleyball for many years. Tod is a former collegiate player and high school and club coach.

**Mark Nixon** is a corporate executive who played volleyball growing up in the U.S. Virgin Islands and then at Princeton University.

**Kim Oden** was captain of the U.S. Women's Olympic team in both 1988 and 1992 and won a bronze medal in 1992. She was a three time All-American at Stanford and two time NCAA player of the year. After her playing career, Kim coached volleyball at the high school and collegiate levels.

**Scott Peluso** is Boys Director at Elevation Volleyball Club in Colorado.

**Mike Pusinowski** is President of the Colorado Boys High School Volleyball Association and the Athletic Director and Head Coach at James Irwin High School.

**Mark Tippett** is Head Coach of the Lincoln College Men's Club Volleyball Team in Lincoln Illinois.

**Ray Vance** is Head Coach of the Bluefield College Men's Volleyball Team, a Division III program in Bluefield, Virginia.

**Kennedy Wells** is Director of Membership, Research and Board Relations for the American Volleyball Coaches Association (AVCA).

**Mary Whitman** is a Parent Advocate and volleyball mom and a director of the Colorado Boys High School Volleyball Association.

**Bradley Wilson** is Manager of Awards and serves as the boys' and men's liaison for the American Volleyball Coaches Association (AVCA).

**Ed Wrather** is the founder of Vortex Volleyball Club in Glenview, Illinois. Ed started playing volleyball while he was in the military where he played on the U.S. Army team.

**Larry Wrather** is a former Ball State player, club coach in the Chicago area, and active competitor in men's volleyball nationally.

*\*The majority of Extending our Reach discussion participants (56%) are people of color themselves.*