

Women's Volleyball Team Travels to China

by Mike Eppolito

The women's volleyball team made history on August 27th when they embarked on a journey to Tianjin, China, becoming the first RIT sports team to leave North America. The trip was planned through an organization known as the Post-Secondary Education Network International (PEN-International).

PEN-International was created as a partnership between the Nippon Foundation of Japan, NTID/RIT, and Japan's Tsukuba College of Technology in order to establish a worldwide university network serving deaf students. The Tianjin Technical College for the Deaf of Tianjin University of Technology (TUT) is one of four sister institutions of NTID, and is also partnered with PEN-International. TUT approached PEN-International in hopes of expanding its existing relationship with RIT beyond the confines of NTID.

The relationship between TUT and RIT actually began in May of last year when TUT sent its martial arts team to visit and perform at RIT. In exchange, RIT agreed to send its volleyball team to Tianjin. According to Coach Roger Worsley, "Restrictions and such from the NCAA put it so that [we] basically were able to go in August during the second week of [the team's] preseason training." The team arrived in Tianjin, which is located an hour and forty-five minutes southeast of Beijing, on August 28th. They received a full-blown welcome by the university and were immediately made to feel at home.

After getting settled in, the RIT women spent about nine days practicing with and competing against TUT's volleyball team. It was quite an experience, considering how TUT's women are the three-time defending national champions of China. Aside from TUT's team, RIT was also fortunate enough to compete against the Tianjin Professional Sports School, a team of disciplined 15-17 year olds. Worsley was pleased with RIT's performance "considering that they had only had one week of practice and [the PSS team] train year round, twelve months a year, five or six days a week, four hours a day." Needless to say, RIT's team put up a good showing, but was hardly at the level of the other teams after only a week of practice.

Aside from practicing and competing against local teams, the women's volleyball team had the opportunity to get out and see a small portion of what China has to offer. They had the opportunity to go shopping, visit the Great Wall, and explore the Forbidden City. For many of the RIT women, the trip was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that Coach Worsley believes "will be something they will talk about for the rest of their lives." Friendships were formed and lessons were learned as the team explored a world unlike the one that they have become so familiar with in the United States.

The partnership between TUT and RIT did not end in China, however, as TUT's volleyball team is planning a visit to RIT, beginning October 1st of this year. The RIT team plans to show the TUT team around not only the Rochester area, but around New York City as well when the teams travel to a tournament at NYU. It is safe to say that the relationship between RIT and TUT will only get stronger as both schools work to give their students the experiences of a lifetime. ■



Women's volleyball head coach Roger Worsley talks to his team in between sets at the RIT Volleyball Invitational, held in the Clark Gym. Kim Wieselberg/REPORTER Magazine.