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## Concord Honored In Legends Program

**EAST LANSING, Mich. – March 8** – The 1986 and 1987 Lower Peninsula Class D Girls Volleyball championship teams from Concord High School will be honored through the Association's "Legends Of The Games" program at ceremonies prior to the Class A championship match game of the 2002 Michigan High School Athletic Association Girls Volleyball Finals at University Arena in Kalamazoo on March 16. The ceremony will begin at approximately 3:30 p.m. (EST).

In its fifth year, the Legends program promotes educational athletics by showcasing some of the great teams of past years. At least 10 members of those teams are expected to be in attendance to receive commemorative plaques and a banner to display at the school during the ceremony.

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(The story that follows is a compilation of various newspaper accounts from those years, including the *Jackson Citizen Patriot*, *Albion Recorder* and *Battle Creek Enquirer*)

Tournaments are won in a day; championship teams are developed over time.

Maybe it was their height, or maybe it was their athleticism. It could have been their quickness or possibly just their personalities. Whatever it was, Concord varsity volleyball head coach Marty Andrews knew this eighth-grade class was something special and headed in his direction.

The tears coming from spectators' eyes weren't tears of sorrow or regret; they were tears of joy, recognizing all of the hard work and dedication that had gone into such a prosperous season. There were former players, parents, siblings, and anonymous people from around town, but they were all more than just faces in the crowd. They represented what made this volleyball team from the small town of Concord so dominant; they represented commitment.

"My sisters, the coach, and the community helped build the program," Susan Franssen said. "The whole community is behind the program."

That commitment helped the Yellow Jackets build a squad that would eventually earn back-to-back Class D titles in 1986 and 1987.

Entering the 1986 Finals, the Yellow Jackets fully expected to leave with the championship trophy. Anything less would have been failure to them, especially for the lone senior on the team, Kathy Snow. For the other Yellow Jackets, there was always next year, but for Snow, it was now or never.

"I really wanted to win it this year," Snow would say at the time. "And I thought we could because we had more team unity."

Confidence was key in the second game of the Semifinals when Concord blew a 13-7 lead to Dryden. The Yellow Jackets could have collapsed after losing their first game in more than 20 matches. Instead, Snow said, "We believed in ourselves and that's what pulled us through."

Not only did they pull through their slight adversity, but they steamrolled all the way through to the first volleyball crown in school history by defeating Leland, 15-9, 15-9, in the 1986 Class D Finals.

There is only one thing more difficult than winning a championship and that is winning back-to-back championships. If Concord was able to sneak up on teams before, that was no longer the case. The Yellow Jackets came into the 1987 season ranked No. 1 and highly favored to capture their second title in as many years after graduating only one starter from the championship team.

"I remember dealing with all the speculation after winning our first championship as to whether or not we should have won," Angela Salvatore, a middle blocker from 1986-1989 recalled. "There was a lot of talk stating if Battle Creek St. Philip had made it to the Finals in 1986, we would have been beaten. In 1987 we met up in the Semifinals and beat them handily in two games, thus proving we were a good team."

"We could have made somebody's season real easily (by losing)," said Coach Andrews. "If we hadn't won, it would have been a real disaster for us."

Fortunately for the community of Concord, there was no disaster. After defeating perennial powerhouse Battle Creek St. Philip in the Semifinals, 15-8, 15-2, Concord was even more dominant in the Finals, beating Suttons Bay, 15-6, 15-3, thus capturing its second straight Class D crown.

After the final point against Suttons Bay, Andrews sat calmly in his chair while his Yellow Jackets jumped and hugged, then laid down and kicked their feet. After a season of playing with the pressure of being the No. 1 ranked team in Class D, he wanted to savor the moment.

"It felt great," said Ginger Bilaski, a senior middle on the 1987 team. "I know I wanted it more in '87 than '86, being my senior season. I was more nervous in '87 (at the Finals). There was more pressure. I was in the back row waiting for our team to serve, and my knees were shaking. That didn't happen in '86."

After winning the first game against Suttons Bay, Concord fell behind 2-0 in the second. A four-point run and a six-point run got the Yellow Jackets comfortably in front. They finished with 50 kills in the two matches, led by Chris Franssen's 10, Penny Loveless' seven, and Salvatore's eight. Senior setter Sue Franssen closed out her four-year varsity career in style, setting up the powerful Concord attackers 72 times, with 30 assists. She also contributed seven aces to lead Concord at the service line, while Loveless was perfect on her 19 serves and Debbie Raymond good on 18-of-19.

Sue Franssen, Loveless, and Bilaski were all named to the All-State Class D first team. In addition, Franssen was voted to the All-State Dream Team for the second consecutive season.

"The support of our community and surrounding communities was overwhelming," said Loveless. "The bond our team had established was very special; we were like a family."

Yes, the Concord volleyball teams in 1986 and 1987 were special. They were victorious in 81 of the 89 matches they played in over the two-year span.

"We had the type of program where the kids developed things at an early age," pointed out Andrews. "Mary Arbuckle was in the stands cheering; she was the eighth-grade coach."

Oh yes, eighth grade, that is where the dream started. When the seniors on the 1987 championship team were in the eighth grade, they were given a cake that had been inscribed with the words "State Champions 1987". Although the year could have been changed to 1986 or instead included the words back-to-back on it, Marty Andrews knew this eighth-grade class was something special and headed in his direction.

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Expected to be in attendance at the awards ceremony are (All last names are from playing days):

Assistant Coach Karen Anderson	Jeanie Isaac	Angela Salvatore
Ginger Bilaski	Adrienne Knickerbocker	Kathy Snow
Chris Franssen	Penny Loveless	
Susan Franssen	Debbie Raymond	

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