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### NCAA addition of beach volleyball adds interest

#### NCAA women to play both indoors and outdoors

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Three summers ago Stephanie Pellitteri started playing beach volleyball before she got involved with high school and club indoor volleyball.

The Pompano Beach junior never dreamed she would have the chance to play both indoor and beach at college.

The NCAA recently approved "sand" volleyball as an emerging spring sport for women and is scheduled to begin varsity competition in the 2010-11 academic year. According to the NCAA, indoor volleyball is the No. 2 women's sport behind basketball with 992 of the 1,064 member schools fielding teams.

Buoyed by Olympic and AVP pro tour exposure and NCAA's interest, beach volleyball's popularity is enjoying a spike in numbers at the junior level.

Pellitteri, 16, and her sisters Kristina, 15, and Brittany, 14, started with the Club Beach Dig program created by AVP pro player and two-time national champion Cindy Phillips, of Deerfield Beach, in 2007. Now the sisters are competing in tournaments in California and Florida, including the Junior Regional Beach Championships that concluded Sunday at South Beach Park.

"It's a great motivation to know we can play beach and indoor at college," said Pellitteri, a consistent top three finisher in juniors and AAA divisions.

"A bunch of my friends in middle school played and that's how I got interested," Pellitteri said. "A lot of the coaches are supporting beach volleyball because it helps our skill level and conditioning. All the training and competing has helped my confidence, too."

Donna Pellitteri and other parents are supportive and involved with their children's beach tournaments much like club and indoors.



"She supports us a lot," Pellitteri said. "She's lugs around our coolers and watches all our games."

[Boca Raton](#)-based Exclusive Sports Marketing stages the Dig The Beach Series for all levels including the juniors program, which has gained national attention because of its numbers.

"Last year we averaged in the 80s and now we are averaging between 120 and 140 two-player teams," ESM President Chris Colgan said. "It's going to up these kids games and help them get a college scholarship."

This past weekend the event attracted a record 220 juniors and 110 teams at the Fort Lauderdale site. The season-high is 280 in Siesta Key.

Phillips has Club Beach satellite programs throughout the state with 15 coaches.

"Since we launched Club Beach Dig we have grown from 40 to 200 kids and are now expanding nationwide," Phillips said. "Now that it's been approved as a college sport, these kids are so excited about the opportunities that are ahead of them."

In the Open Division late Saturday, newlywed Mike DiPierro, of Pompano Beach, and Neil Mayo, of Fort Lauderdale, won the men's title and Capri Hilgendorf, of West Palm Beach, and Marcella Gamarra, of Miami, won the women's title.

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#### **Results**

For complete results, go to [dig thebeachseries .com](http://dig.thebeachseries.com)

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