

NetResult

During the late '70s, the Rutgers–Newark men's volleyball team forged the greatest dynasty in Rutgers history, gaining national attention and launching volleyball as a legitimate collegiate sport.

In the lobby of the Golden Dome Athletic Center on the Newark Campus, two burly, well-dressed men pause as they pass a trophy case. Behind the glass are four large trophies that commemorate the Rutgers–Newark men's volleyball team's four straight trips to the NCAA Final Four—evidence that the men, who happen to be first cousins, were part of the greatest sports dynasty in Rutgers history.

Today, you would be lucky to find anybody on campus who knows of them or the team and its remarkable run from 1977 to 1981 that was responsible for elevating the status of volleyball as a collegiate sport on the East Coast. But for Peter Melnyk NCAS'78 and Nestor Paslawsky, rarely does a day go by that they don't recall the time of boisterous campus pep rallies and students filling the Golden Dome for their matches. "The publicity leading up to that first Final Four in 1977 helped put the sport on the map at Penn State, George Mason, and other schools," says Paslawsky, the star middle hitter-blocker.

The 1977 team mesmerized sports fans. Bill Mazur's *Sports Extra*, a popular television sports program, visited the all-commuter campus to cover the story; the *New York Times* sent a reporter to the Final Four; and the New Jersey legislature issued a proclamation honoring the team's success. The *Star-Ledger's* Jerry Izenberg wrote before the Final Four: "And the sun-tanned apolloes of UCLA (student population: 33,228) and USC (28,014), or the muscular squad from Ohio State (54,640), better not treat them lightly. Little David (student population: 3,800) is coming to play."



Cousins Peter Melnyk, left, and Nestor Paslawsky were stars of the Rutgers–Newark volleyball team, which, after becoming a Division I team, made four straight trips to the Final Four.

The team was first coached by Taras Hunczak, who taught Eastern European history and was active in the large Newark/Irvington Ukrainian community. His family emigrated indirectly from West Ukraine to Buffalo, New York, following World War II; Hunczak had learned to play volleyball in a German displaced persons camp as a 12-year-old. Years later, when he was a professor at Rutgers–Newark in 1974, his nephew, Melnyk, a freshman who starred on an amateur Ukrainian club team in New York City, helped him start a volleyball club.



The 1978 Rutgers-Newark Scarlet Raiders - Front row from left, John Pendlebury - Trainer, Roman Kolinsky, Andrew Holyonskyj, Bodhan Zawadowycz, Ryuichi Furusawa, Roman Wasiczko. Back row from left, Alex Popovich - Coach, George Temnych, Peter Melnyk, Mark Ainsworth, Doug Emich, Borys Otshaniwsky, Nestor Paslawsky, Tom Dunlap - Manager, Dr. Taras Hunczak - Coordinator.

RUTGERS-NEWARK

NCAA Action!
National Volleyball Championship
 UCLA
 Pauley Pavilion
 May 6-7, 1977

LOOKS TO BRIGHT VOLLEYBALL FUTURE
N-Rutgers proved it belongs
 By CAROL HODES

THE RUTGERS OBSERVER
 TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 1977
 VOLUME 138 NUMBER 17
 A Special Weekend At R-N
 Halloween Festival, Gym Opening
Crowds Flock To Campus' Big Events
 By KAREN LARONDE
 and MARIA SIBONICO

OPINIONS
Jerry Izenberg At Large
 Little David
 RUTGERS OBSERVER

NEWARK TEAM IN VOLLEYBALL FINAL 4 TONIGHT
'Rutgers who?' is ready
 By CAROL HODES
 LOS ANGELES - A handful of

EXCITING VOLLEYBALL ACTION
Rutgers Newark Scarlet Raiders vs. Livingston College and NJIT
 At NJIT gymnasium, Wednesday, April 5 at 6:00 p.m. Admission free. For further information, call Phys. Ed. at 648-5474.

Because the Golden Dome was still three years from opening, the team practiced in a big room at 53 Washington Street, now part of the Newark Museum. It played all of its games on the road, shuttling to matches jammed in the back of a van. In 1975, Hunczak convinced the campus's athletic director to make volleyball a varsity sport. In its inaugural season, in 1975-76, the team went 43-3, advancing to the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) championship game at Kansas State University in which they lost a close match to Iowa's Graceland College.

Hunczak next successfully lobbied administrators to make men's volleyball a Division I sport—a small miracle considering that all the other sports at Rutgers-Newark are Division III. The team—a mix of Ukrainians from the Newark area complemented by a player

from Haiti and another from Japan—finished the season 41-1, sweeping all five matches in the Eastern Collegiate Volleyball League Tournament at West Point. The team, then coached by Russian native Mario Treibitch, lost in May of 1977 to number-one ranked University of Southern California at the University of California, Los Angeles Pauley Pavilion at the Final Four, but Paslawsky was unanimously selected "All-Tournament, All-American" and later became a member of the U.S. men's national team.

In the fall of 1977, the Golden Dome opened with a sold-out match between Rutgers-Newark and the U.S. men's national team. "We had 1,100 crazy fans in the gym," says Melnyk. "The match was an even more formidable challenge than the Final Four. But, somehow, behind the frenzy of our first home-court advantage, we managed to win the first game before losing a best-of-five match." Adds Paslawsky, with a big grin: "I still run into a few of those national team guys, and they still make excuses for losing a game to us."
 — Bill Glavin