



# Public Relations Recommendation for MSU Denver Women's Volleyball 2024

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## Executive Summary

Volleyball is experiencing a huge boom in popularity across the U.S. With an 8.4% increase in players since 2012 and as one of the only sports to grow its' player base during the pandemic, volleyball has grown to be the second most popular sport for new athletes behind only football. MSU Denver is in a great position to capitalize on the growth in popularity of women's volleyball.

The primary objective of this campaign is to increase attendance, visibility, and awareness of our team. The secondary objectives include building up the brand image, community outreach and fan engagement. College volleyball has taken great strides in promoting the product and it is clear just looking at the most recent successes. The 2022 NCAA D1 championship had 1.2 million viewers, Nebraska recently sold out their football stadium with over 90,000 fans in attendance and a recent regular season matchup between Nebraska and Wisconsin received over 650,000 viewers while competing with college football. MSU Denver can take advantage of its popularity by highlighting the achievements of Coach Jenny Glenn and the culture of competitiveness she has fostered.

After conducting a SWOT analysis covering MSU Denver Volleyball, the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats can be acknowledged. MSU Denver's biggest strength is the ability to compete for a national championship every year. Though they have not yet won a championship, MSU Denver has made the NCAA tournament for 23 consecutive seasons. Coach Glenn boasts a 170-40 overall record and an 116-8 record in conference play. The ability to recruit, develop and coach different players every year gives MSU Denver a prime opportunity to compete for national titles. The volleyball team plays in the Auraria Event Center which underwent an \$8,000,000 renovation in 2019 that paid for updated locker rooms, a new scoreboard, and modern bleacher seating to make MSU Denver a premier school in terms of facilities.

The primary weaknesses facing the program are having a low budget for athletics, being a commuter school leading to an apathetic fanbase and lack of promotion on campus. Being a commuter school in Division 2 athletics comes with its' own challenges. Students can be apathetic toward school athletics, and it makes it tough to garner to any school spirit. There are a few universities that succeed despite being a commuter school though. Rutgers, Florida International University, University of Nevada Las Vegas and the University of Texas San Antonio all support competitive athletic programs in Division 1 while over 70% of their students live off-campus. MSU Denver also misses the mark when it comes to promoting the volleyball team. A survey conducted in September of 2023 had an alarmingly high number of respondents who either did not know MSU Denver had a volleyball team or if they did, they had no idea when the games were played. With a growing fan base and player base nationwide and in the age of social media, MSU Denver volleyball simply has no excuse to not promote one of their successful programs.

MSU Denver has many opportunities to address these weaknesses. Using players and coaches as trusted ambassadors for volleyball will allow the program to grow a strong online presence. There is also ample opportunity to reach out to alumni by using newsletters, hosting alumni events and bringing the current students together with former students to create a sense of community and pride within the program. MSU Denver should also seek to further engage with students by hosting events on campus on the day of or the day prior to the biggest matches. Rivalry games preceded by sponsored tailgates bring a sense of excitement and anticipation. The next step MSU Denver should take is partnering with local and regional media. The new TV partnership between HUDL and the NCAA is a great opportunity to get more people to watch volleyball even if they cannot attend the events in person.

MSU Denver Volleyball does face a few outside threats such as being one of the smaller in-state schools, a lack of NIL deals due to low alumni engagement and an atypical college demographic. With both CU Boulder and Colorado State University being less than an hour from MSU Denver, the state's

higher-level athletes often choose to go to the programs that have better facilities, more fan engagement, bigger budgets and national recognition. 2024 will see four professional volleyball leagues begin, and national recognition is a huge factor when athletes are choosing their future school. While MSU Denver does have the Red and Blue fund to help support college athletics, there is not an established NIL fund to help sponsor volleyball players. Among the ever-changing landscape of college sports, MSU Denver must find a way to establish itself as a legitimate competitor for athletes choosing a college. Those other schools also enjoy a population of typical college-aged students. MSU Denver is home to many students outside of that age range. On top of being a commuter school, many students are also raising families, working full-time or managing another responsibility outside of being a student. Attending athletic events does not make the list of priorities for many students.

This plan aims to bring attention to MSU Denver women's volleyball in a flourishing market by capitalizing on the success the team is currently enjoying. It can be done by gaining support from alumni, local and regional media and engaging with the student base. If these steps are taken, the brand will become more visible, become a well-known brand across the region and increase attendance to create an environment that gives the team an oppressive home environment to overwhelm incoming opponents.

## SWOT Analysis

### Strengths:

- Premier facilities
- Culture of success (23 consecutive NCAA Division 2 tournament appearances)
- Consistent social media using owned media

### Weaknesses:

- Low athletic budget
- Lack of promotion
- Poor attendance
- Commuter school

### Opportunities:

- Student engagement events
- Alumni fundraisers
- Corporate sponsors
- New TV deal between NCAA and HUDL
- Popularity of volleyball is skyrocketing

### Threats:

- Colorado schools with bigger budgets, better recognition, and better facilities
- Atypical college demographic
- Few or no NIL sponsorships

## GOST (Goal, Objectives, Strategies, Tactics)

### Goal:

- To increase awareness of the MSU Denver Volleyball program to build up the fanbase.

Objective: Increase fan attendance by 50% from the 2023 season to the 2024 season.

### Strategy 1:

- Create an interactive fan experience for maximum engagement.

### Tactic 1:

- Host an all-day tailgate event on campus leading up to the first conference home game of the season.
  - Using social media, telephone, e-mail and any other form of communication, alumni and former team members should be contacted personally and invited to the event.
    - Invitations should be sent NLT July 31<sup>st</sup> to allow enough time for scheduling.
  - The event needs to be promoted ahead of time to current students. Using the quad to host the event is ideal because it puts more eyes on the event and invites student engagement.
- Formative Evaluation:
  - Comparing the attendance numbers to the previous seasons can give a relative estimate of the numbers expected at the first home match of the season. If the previous season had 300 attendees, then the goal would be to raise that number to 400 or more.
- Summative Evaluation:

- At the end of the season, attendance numbers can be viewed and evaluated to see if the number of attendees went up for just the tailgate game, or if the numbers stayed consistent throughout the year.

#### **Tactic 2:**

- Establish the Rowdy Roadrunners super fan group.
  - Fans who attend four or more games are deemed super fans. This can be tracked by scanning student identification cards and handing out punch cards to fans when they get their tickets.
  - Being a superfan comes with opportunities to win prizes, create chants, invitation to a dinner party at the end of the season, and being a trusted ambassador for the team. The fans are an extension of the team, and the super fans can help create an oppressive home atmosphere while maintaining the 6 pillared foundation laid by the coaching staff.
- **Formative evaluation:**
  - As there are currently no members of this group, the mark of success in the first year is arbitrary. Setting the goal to 50 super fans by the end of season seems realistic based on average attendance numbers from earlier seasons.
- **Summative evaluation:**
  - At the end of the season, the number of punches and scans can be tallied. With a baseline of zero, this tactic will be great at finding frequent attendees and what days they are the most attended.

#### **Strategy 2:**

- Increase social media engagement.

#### **Tactic 1:**



- Begin a share campaign on Instagram
  - Fans are given a 72-hour window to share a post promoting an upcoming match. Once a fan shares the post, they are given a free punch on their punch card.
  - Fans who share the post are automatically entered into a raffle that awards \$30.00 to the team store. The winner will be announced at the match, and they must be there to receive the reward.
- **Formative Evaluation:**
  - The MSU Denver Volleyball Instagram page receives around 80 likes per post with the highest performing posts reaching 200+. Viewing the engagement level throughout the 72-hour window will allow the PR team to decide if the post is successful and whether there should be more promotions throughout the season.
- **Summative Evaluation:**
  - After the 72-hour window closes, the PR team will cross reference social media engagement and the attendance numbers of the match that was promoted. If social media engagement increases, then ideally the attendance will increase as well.

#### **Tactic 2:**

- Utilize the main MSU Denver Instagram page to promote super fans, upcoming matches, and major successes. They do some of this already, it just needs to be done more consistently. The main page has 13,000 more followers than the volleyball page. Posting on the main page increases brand awareness for the team.

#### **Strategy 3:**

- Conduct media outreach to gain more coverage from local, regional and national media outlets.

#### **Tactic 1:**

- Begin a relationship with the writers whose beat includes prep and college sports.
  - Having newspapers, online news sites, TV stations and writers who manage a blog cover the volleyball team allows the PR team to reach many demographics. At a school with an atypical college demographic, it is imperative that this campaign reaches as many eyes as possible.

**Tactic 2:**

- The PR team can draft press releases for any major accomplishments, events and big announcements.
  - Sending out the press release with a relevant pitch can help ensure the team receives maximum exposure. Pitch examples can be found on the next page.

**Other potential strategies include:**

- **Community engagement**
- **Student outreach**
- **Alumni outreach**
- **Sponsorship development**

## Pitch Example

RMAC volleyball tournament interest

Sean Keeler Denver Post

Client - MSU Denver Athletics

- **MSU Denver is hosting the RMAC Volleyball tournament**
- **Regional tournament for Division 2 volleyball**
- **National Title Implications**

Hey Sean, I have read your work for the Denver Post covering collegiate and prep sports. I wanted to give you a heads up that MSU Denver is hosting the RMAC Volleyball tournament. MSU Denver is favored to win the tournament and has national title hopes this season.

The tournament starts on [DATE], and the first game is at [TIME] in the Auraria Event Center featuring MSU Denver against [OPPONENT]. MSU Denver has made 22 straight national tournament appearances and aspires for their first championship. The team is led by junior outside hitter, Riley Anderson, and senior middle blocker, Ember Canty.

If you are interested in attending or covering this event, I would love to support your story anyway that I can. Attached are the full stats from this year's team.

-Jake Smith

[your phone number]

## Press Release

### MSU DENVER HAS QUALIFIED FOR THEIR 23<sup>rd</sup> STRAIGHT NATIONAL TOURNAMENT APPEARANCE

**Denver, Colorado — Nov. 20, 2023** — The MSU Denver women's volleyball team will appear in the NCAA Division 2 tournament for the 23<sup>rd</sup> consecutive year. After finishing 23-6 in the regular season, the Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference runner-up will head to Canyon, Texas to face Texas A&M Kingsville on Nov. 30th in the first round of the national tournament.

The Roadrunners finished the season as the 8<sup>th</sup> ranked team in the country and drew the 3<sup>rd</sup> seed in the South Central region after losing to Regis in the final game of the RMAC tournament. MSU Denver received a lot of love during the awards season as they had 3 First Team All-Conference players (Canty, Anderson, Ladky), 3 Second Team All-Conference players (McClinton, Williams, McCrimmon) and the RMAC Coach of the Year, Jenny Glenn. Two more players (Eckhardt and Qershia) received honorable mentions as well.

Coach Glenn and the Roadrunners are excited to face a new opponent in Texas A&M Kingsville. Glenn told an MSU Denver reporter, "It'll be fun. We don't know a ton about them yet... We'll get a good scout on them the next few days."

Thanks to a new deal with Hudl, the Roadrunners matches can be viewed [on Roadrunner TV](#) throughout the entire tournament for just \$29.95. Hudl will broadcast every single match of the tournament available on Fire TV, Roku, Google TV and Apple TV.

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## Recommendations

A public relations and marketing strategy for MSU Denver Women's volleyball should focus on growth among the student and alumni bases and using the players as trusted ambassadors to reach their fellow students.

**Student Base:** Encapsulating the attention of the current student base is crucial to MSU Denver's goal of attendance growth. Hosting on-campus events, building the Super Fan experience, and giving entries to raffles and door prizes for attendees are all great ways to expand the student fan base.

**Social Media Growth:** Using share campaigns and rewards for participating builds upon the earlier recommendation and brings in new followers for the sport. The popularity of volleyball is obscene, and MSU Denver can promote the success of this team and create awareness of how good it is.

**Alumni and Community Relations Using the 6 Pillars:** The alumni from MSU Denver and the Auraria community understand what it means to be resilient. Using 6 integral messages; integrity, communication, perfect effort, growth mindset, growing together and love and respect, the MSU Denver Volleyball team builds resilience in its' players and creates a team that can identify with the community they play in. Promoting these pillars along with doing community outreach, the volleyball team can really start to build a fan base that does not just rely on the student body.

## **Conclusion**

MSU Denver has a chance to capitalize on the popularity of volleyball in the U.S.A. and market the Roadrunners volleyball team as a must-see event while on campus. Building relationships in the community, with the alumni and student base, and creating interactive experience for the fans are all ways to achieve the goals of bringing up attendance numbers and increasing the fan base.