

# Colorado Daily

## **VOLLEYBALL: Nygaard teaches sun safety**

### **PRO VOLLEYBALL STAR JEFF NYGAARD SURVIVED SKIN CANCER, NOW SPREADS AWARENESS**

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Ahh, summertime in Boulder. People go outside all the time to enjoy the environment and the sunshine.

But maybe they forget the sunscreen and maybe they get a tan or a little bit of a sunburn. No big deal, right?

It's a big deal to professional beach volleyball player Jeff Nygaard, because he is a skin cancer survivor.

Around May of last year, while playing volleyball in Istanbul, Turkey, Nygaard noticed something on his back. He scratched it to discover himself in an unusual amount of pain.

"When something showed that didn't grow into a pimple or something, I'd get a little nervous," said Nygaard. "But I never took that extra step of going to get it checked out."

After his wife set up an appointment with a dermatologist, Nygaard found out that it was a very common, and benign, skin growth that could be easily removed. While at the dermatologist, Nygaard found something else out, something much more serious.

The doctor noticed a mark on Nygaard's upper bicep that really concerned him, much to Nygaard's surprise.

"I had no idea," said Nygaard. "I didn't think twice about it. It was like a big freckle."

A few days after the doctor's appointment, Nygaard received a call. The doctor asked him if he was okay.

"The thing on my mind was, 'Why are you asking me if I'm okay?'" said Nygaard.

The big freckle on his upper bicep turned out to be Melanoma, a very serious and potentially fatal form of skin cancer.

Fortunately, it was Stage 1 Melanoma, or the earliest stage that can be classified as Melanoma. The cancer hadn't yet begun to grow beneath his skin into his bloodstream where it would do the most damage.

Nygaard was referred to a cancer specialist with an appointment scheduled for a month after his diagnosis.

"A month?" I was thinking, 'I've got skin cancer growing on my arm and you want me to wait a month?'" said Nygaard.

He then went through a rather protracted process of treatment. Two weeks after the diagnosis, he went in for a consult. Then, due to a long waiting list, he was to have surgery four to five weeks later. Nygaard was, however, able to convince the doctors to let him have the surgery a month after his diagnosis. The surgery was a success.

"I was left with a scar to commemorate a lifetime of stupidity in the sun," said Nygaard.

Nygaard is still capable of spending his days in the sun playing volleyball, but he makes a conscious effort to reduce his risk of sun damage. He wears clothing specifically designed for sun protection, as well as several coats of sunscreen over the course of a day.

Nygaard has also made an effort to reduce the risk of skin cancer for others as well by raising awareness.

Throughout the summer he has been participating in the 2008 AVP Crocs Tour. The 2003 AVP Most Valuable Player has been working with the Sun Safety Alliance to raise awareness about skin cancer, while on the tour.

He has made media appearances and hosted interviews on every stop of the tour so far and will do so at all 18 locations that the AVP visits.

One of the locations is Folsom Field in Boulder, Colo. The AVP Crocs Tour will be there beginning this Friday and will run from July 4-6. The three-time Olympian Nygaard will be acting both as a competitor, and as a spokesperson for the Sun Safety Alliance.

By working to raise skin cancer awareness, Nygaard feels as though he has found a positive out of his experience with Melanoma.

"It has been the best worst thing that has ever happened to me," said Nygaard. "Because now I have something personal to say and quite honestly, talking about it is really empowering. It helps me deal with it."

By helping himself, he is also helping others.

Nygaard hopes that each small media appearance and interview builds up to create something much bigger; something that could lead to widespread practice of sun safety. Perhaps then, fewer people will have to go through what he did.

For ticket information for the Boulder Crocs Slam held July 4-6 go to [www.cubuffs.com](http://www.cubuffs.com) or call CU sports information. For more information on how not to be one of the 1,180 estimated new cases of melanoma that will be diagnosed in Colorado in 2008, see [www.sunsafetyalliance.org](http://www.sunsafetyalliance.org).

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