

## NL 18-1, 18-2, 18-3 travel to Italy

The Northern Lights 18-1, 18-2, & 18-Black teams will be traveling and competing in Italy from April 2- April 10. They will be spending the first few days sightseeing in Rome, Florence, and Venice. After that they will be competing in a tournament in Pordenone Italy (18-1), Falconara (18-2), and Milan (18-Black) with Junior teams from around the world.

Tournament Link for Pordenone=<http://www.memorial-cornacchia.com>

No links available for Falconara or Milan tournaments

Day 1

April 2 - Arrival to Rome

By: Julianne Blomberg

Our adventure to Italy began in the Minneapolis airport. Checking in and security went by fast and nothing too eventful had happened exceptttt for the fact that the Michigan baseball team was at a gate right by ours. Sadly not one of us girls gained the courage to actually talk to them so we just looked like creepy stalkers staring at these guys. Then finally we boarded the plane and began the nine hour flight to Amsterdam. We all had a personal TV to watch so that made the flight go by a lot faster. But eventually everyone was sleeping, except for me. I just sat there for the whole flight twisting and turning trying to find a comfortable position to sleep in.

Then once we landed in Amsterdam we had about four hours to kill till our flight to Rome departed so some did homework, others slept, but a few girls and myself entertained ourselves with yoga and screaming at a rat we found. Then we began boarding the plane for Rome which was a two and a half hour flight. On this flight EVERYONE was sleeping. Except me again. Next we picked up our luggage and thankfully no one's was lost. We met up with our guide and he took us to our bus which took us to the center of Rome.

We stopped at our hotel which has extremely small rooms but that's fine with me when we get to stay in the middle of Rome. Then right away we began site seeing. We went to go see the Spanish steps, the Trevi Fountain and the Pantheon. These places were incredible! It's crazy to see buildings and monuments so old and intricate. You can't even compare it to the boring skyscrapers we see every day in Minnesota.

After our site seeing adventure we went to a restaurant to finally get some dinner. We were all starving since the last time we had eaten was on the plane from Amsterdam. We cleaned the entrée plates off so fast you would have thought we had never seen food. After we ate multiple plates of spaghetti, lasagna, bread, and salad Andy walked over and said I don't know if you are aware but that was just the appetizer we still have to get the main courses. So then the waiters brought out potatoes and veal something and chicken, it all tasted really good! At this point everyone was full and exhausted considering it was 10 pm which mean it feels like 4 am to us. We walked back to the hotel which only took about 2 minutes and crashed. But for some reason even if you are extremely tired, which I was after not sleeping for more than 24 hours, you can't stay asleep so everyone in our room woke up at 4 am and just started talking and finished off the pizza I had ordered for myself.

The trip has been surreal so far! We are all trying to take as many pictures as possible but they don't do anything justice.

### [Pictures from Day 1](#)

[Ashley at the Spanish Steps](#)

[Kayla talks about the day](#)

### Day 2

April 3 – Rome

By: Amber Krenske & Taylor Lockett

Sleeping was hard last night due to the tremendous time change. I woke up at 4 and was wide awake, but then when I had to wake up at 7:15 it was terrible. The breakfast at the hotel was simple and nice, we enjoyed biscuits and nutella. Oh, and the hot chocolate was AMAZING!

We took the metro to the Vatican. Thanh and his wife, Steph, couldn't fit on our train though cause we were there during rush hour. But after they joined the group, we finished our journey to the Vatican. Thank goodness we had passes to get in because the line went on for hours! Our tour guide's name was Antonio, and he has been giving tours to lights players for a few years now. And he knows what he's talking about. I learned a lot! Everything in the Vatican was breathtaking. Everything was so detailed and intricate that it's hard to imagine how much time was spent creating those masterpieces.

For lunch we went to a pizza and pasta place with the 18-Black team. The pasta was delicious, but the pizza could've been better. One thing we've noticed is that people in Rome do whatever they want; like wandering in front of speeding cars, parking in crosswalks, parking with two people piling in one spot, and mopeds passing every car they can squeeze between.

After a long day of touring, we took what felt like an hour long bus ride to a gym to play a local team. We watched the 18-Black team play before we faced our opponents. Both of the teams we played were very talented and scrimmaging them definitely helped us get ready for our tournament.

So far we're loving Rome!!!!!!!!!!

### [Pictures from Day 2](#)

[Alex & Lindsey team up to tell us about the day](#)

### Day 3

April 4 – Rome

By: Kelley Wollack

Hello! Or should I say Ciao! I am here to write a rousing rendition of today's events. Everyday in Italy has a thousand stories from different perspectives but I am going to tell today from my perspective in full detail, so be prepared yourself because I am not gonna hold back. Let's start

things off with the morning.

We were afforded the amazing opportunity to sleep in till about nine unfortunately I didn't make it that long... So, we needed to take three showers this morning before breakfast and I was going to be the first one in around 8:15. So, when the alarm went off, I promptly got up and in the tiny shower (3x3x6... can't even shave your legs...) Anyways I worked with what I had and got outta the bathroom all nice and clean and ready for the day when Ashley says in a morning groan, "Do you know what time it is? It's like 6:30." Ahhh mmaannnnn come onnnnnnnn maannnnnnnnn welp turns out that Ashley's school alarm went off at 6:15 and I assumed it was Marens.. it wasn't. But, no one decided to stop me nopppeee haha. So, I went back to bed with wet hair and got a up a little bit later when we went to breakfast. But, the fun was yet to begin! We all got dressed and ready together; sharing clothes, doing each other's hair, etc. Everyone was looking cute and girly with shorts and dresses as we walked out the door. As all 30 of us are walking down the uneven, cobblestone street, we were constantly being gawked at where ever we go. And Italians have no shame in stopping and staring. There were defiantly some awkward moments on the metro on our way to our destination. And what was our destination you ask? Well, think about the most iconic symbols of Rome. Yes, the coliseum.

We got to the coliseum and it was overwhelmingly magnificent. It felt as if we were in a movie, like it wasn't real. The old bricks towered over us and eclipsed the sun. We had a little bit of a delay/problem with our ticket to get in so our tour guide, Antonio, had to go back and figure things out... which gave us plenty of time to find some trouble. As we are sitting on the side of the coliseum, this huge group of Italian teenage boys walked by, then back, and then walked by again, needless to say, staring at all of us. Then they got up to the courage to take a picture with us... next thing you know we are being swarmed by 40 Italian boys asking for pictures and asking our names. Some girls even were surprised with a brave kiss on the cheek from the braver ones. Well, I'd just like to say, I, and a few others, sneakily got out of the situation because we are the ones with boyfriends. Sooo, Curt was getting nervous this whole time and then finally they left.

Then, Antonio got back and we entered the coliseum. Words cannot do this justice. It was incredible towering into the clear blue sky and standing strong after centuries of adversities like earth quakes and robbers. The stairs were so steep that your legs were burning by the time you got to the upper level. We circled around that floor taking most likely hundreds of pictures : Then we went down to the bottom deck to take even more pictures. There were huge columns we waked through to gaze that this truly incredible sight. After we got the whole group back we then went to see where the emperor used to live.

We walked up this huge hill with beautiful scenery, white little flowers in the grass and purple flowering trees. Again, it was a workout in itself to get up the hill where he lived. There were huge ruins of where buildings, aqueducts, and temples used to be on the land. When we got the other side of the hill, more like a mountain really, we got to see the most beautiful view in Rome. It was so pretty with all of the sand and red stone colored buildings, ruins, and dome churches. I hope he puts a picture up of that because it was incredible. Then after that we came down the other side of the hill and went through the ancient city center. It was amazing to see the columns still standing. After going through there our tour was over of ancient Rome. It was crazy to think

that I was actually standing in the place I studied in world history.

Then the teams broke off and the twos had to make it on their own to go shopping (even though we barely had enough time) But, many people do not know this, I am a map master. I lead us back to the metro. So, today I led the team to the shopping center. Thank you, thank you, I'll be here all week. Anyways, we shopped for about 45 minutes and got some steals! I have found a new adrenaline high... price bargaining. So Liza is looking for something for her dad (I can't tell you because he'll probably read this blog... hey Luis) and originally it was 20 Euros but I got it down to 15. So, I was feeling pretty good about myself. But, then Jackie asked me to haggle down the price of this purse she wanted to get for her sister. So, I look at the purse and give a pensive look. Convincing. Then that brings the attention of the sales guy. He tells me the price, 38 Euro, and I look kinda disgusted and disappointed. Then, it's a subtle look in the eyes and the tilt of my head. An idea of a new price comes into my head. Gotta go way low, Kell. "20." He shakes his head, a little insulted but still ready to deal. I look at the purse, look back at him, then give him a new price, still low. "24" He hesitates a little but then starts pointing out the uniqueness of the purse and it's features. I counter attack with some made up flaws of the purse. He gives me a price. "33." He's coming down now, in the palm of my hand. I give a little body language of putting the bag down, then stop, and look up. My final offer: "28." "Yes, yes good deal," in his Italian accent. Boom. Winning. I have found a new hobby.

After that we headed back to the hotel and got ready to play. We walked to the place we have had our meals for the past couple of days and sat down to some nice salad, pasta, chicken, and potatoes. Delizioso! We headed back to the hotel for a bit before our bus came to pick us up for the match. Naturally many of us napped or were on the Web trying to connect to the US while we still can. Then the bus came and we were headed to a mystery place to play a mystery team.

When we arrived, we found that there was a rhythmic gymnastic session going on. Whoa. I have never seen anything like that before. There looked like they were just floating on the floor and twirling with their hula hoops. Well, some of them were pretty graceful, but others... yyeeahhh not so much. But, we got ready for the match and our opponents came in. They were women. Not, girls, like 21 to 29 year olds. But, we played pretty well, took them to four. But, they came out on top good aggressive servers.

On the way home, Alli talked Curt into taking us for some gelato because it was the last night we were going to be with Curt (Not sure if that info is exactly correct buuutt it worked so hey!!) Of course, health nut, Jackie was grinding her teeth the whole time : Well, It is time for bed now. Headed off to Falconara tomorrow! Very excited to see the countryside.

Goodbye form Rome! Ciao.

[Pictures from Day 3](#)  
[Kelsey in Rome](#)

Day 4

April 5 - Rome to Venice and Falconara

By: Ashley Peper

Ciao! We had a rough night of sleep last night but are somehow not tired yet. We had breakfast at eight am. People had a variety of cornflakes, beverages and bread. The orange juice tasted a tad spiked, but it was delicious all the same. We then took our bags and rolled them through the streets of Rome to catch the train to Florence. We received many awkward stares from the locals. We waited about 15 minutes for our train at the Metro Station and then hopped on. Curt bought everyone apples and bananas that were top notch. Thanks Curt!

The train was about an hour and a half. Most people took a power nap. Once we were off the train we all got into some taxis to take us to the next train station. Some taxi drivers hit pedestrians and others were texting on two phones, all while swerving around vespas and buses. You should be happy your daughter is alive.

Once we were at the next train station we dropped off our bags and went to see the streets of Florence! We took off on a brisk walk and had a brief meeting at the Duomo. It was beautiful! Then, we were allowed to run around on our own for two hours. We were all given 10 euro for lunch. We stopped in cafés and bought either sandwiches or pizza. There were many cute shops and vendors that we purchased shirts or presents at. There was a river just a few blocks away from the Duomo as well. After our two hours of freedom we got back on the train to take us to Venice. It's about a two hour train ride and most people took a nap, including Curt.

Once we were off the train we rolled our bags around some more, made a few wrong turns, but made it to the hotel. Some of the rooms have balcony's and the rooms are good quality over all. After about 30 minutes we were off to another train to go tour around the Grand Canal of Venice. It was a little cloudy out but still beautiful scenery. We broke off into groups and were given some time to have fun and eventually make it to the Rialto Bridge and the San Marco Plaza. Some of us took gondola rides, toured the back roads and alleys, shopped and looked like tourists taking photos of every inch. Two hours later, we all met back up and went to dinner. It was a cute place where we were served spaghetti and chicken with french fries. After, Curt bought us all gelato. Thanks again to Curt! Then Lindsey Ryan and myself led the group on a brisk and winding journey through winding alleys to get back to the train station. We had missed a train by about two minutes, so we just sat around by the water for a bit. Then we hopped back on the train and almost fell asleep!

Everyone is currently packing up and getting ready to pass out. Tomorrow the 18 1 team will be heading to Pordenone to start their tournament and the 18 black team will be heading to Milan!! We will also be going back to Venice and the Grand Canal for about an hour or two tomorrow morning to get one last look.

[Pictures from Day 4](#)

[Amber talks about Florence](#)

[Church bells in Florence](#)

[Anna S and Ashley H by the church in San Marco Plaza](#)

Day 5 April 6

Venice to Milan 18 Black

Venice to Pordenone 181  
Falconara Tournament 182

By: Natalee Johnson & Aly Johnson

Ciao! Last night we spent wandering around Venice. When we first got there, we got settled in our rooms and all got ready to go out on the town. We took a quick train ride and arrived at the Grand Canal. We broke off into smaller groups and got to roam around the city. We took about three hundred pictures on the Rialto Bridge it was unreal. Everywhere we went it looked like we were on a postcard the buildings were so beautiful! Becca, Paige, Aly and I were the first to go on a Gondola in the canal. Our gondola guides name was Luca. He told us some history about the city of Venice and it was interesting to hear about some of the secrets of the city. We went out to dinner in the heart of Venice and our first course was spaghetti and after we had some good old America chicken and fries, which were amazing. To top the night off Curt took all of us out for Gelato, which was my third gelato of the day no one can ever have too much gelato! After gelato we actually sprinted through the alleys and side streets of Venice to get back to the train station. We went through so many alleys off the beaten path to get to the train station and then went back to the hotel and all decided we wanted to spend some time in Venice the next morning.

This morning, we got up early had breakfast, finished packing up our bags and headed back to Venice to walk around some more and see some of the city we didn't get to see yesterday. Paige, Aly, Becca and I went to a smoothie shop and had out of this world smoothie. We just walked around and enjoyed the city and the views. The bridges were so pretty just to look at, there were so many different bridges it was nice to see that they were all different. We saw a market that had all fresh fruit, and fresh vegetables. Then along the same way things started to get fishy, there was fresh seafood on the streets it was so fresh. I like how there markets are so fresh the food is here. For lunch we stopped and got some pizza to go and headed back to the train station, and were on our way to Milan.

Once we got to Milan, we got to Hotel Ibis and changed and went out on the town. We went to the Duomo church in the center of Milan. It was an amazing church. The ceilings were super high and it had a lot of detail. After we went through the church we broke off into groups and went shopping. There were a ton of designer shops and high end stores. Becca got a super cute jacket, Paige, Kayla and I got really cute bags from Zara and we found tons of stores that they have here that we don't have in America that we fell in love with. Milan was a fun place to shop and it felt like we were in New York. After shopping we went out to dinner at the Calafuria Unione where we could either have pizza, pasta or risotto. It was a cute place to eat and had splendid food! We also had a variety of authentic Italian deserts like tiramisu, a pastry like cake, and chocolate cream puffs, everything was delicious! Overall Milan was a fun, upbeat city to be in and it was a blast! Editor's note on 181 & 182:

182: Yesterday the they 182 team won both of their matches in their tournament pool. Today they won their match in the morning which put them in 1st in their pool and they moved onto the quarter finals as a top seed. They won the Quarter final match and are now going to play in the semi finals on Saturday morning. They like their little bungalows and have even been doing

wash and hanging it outside on the laundry lines they have. The restaurant where they eat most of their meals is located over the water and they said it's neat to hear the waves crashing into the shore below as they eat.

181: They played a friendly match against a very good Slovenian Jr National team. We lost all 3 sets, but they played fairly well. Tonight they did their opening ceremonies and were a big hit with all the boy's teams. They will start their official tournament tomorrow morning and play 2-3 matches. The 181 team is staying in the same hotel as the Dutch Jr National team which has the same girls on it that stayed with us last winter in Minnesota/Omaha. They are having a good time talking with them again. [Pictures from Day 5](#)[Curt's short Gondola ride](#)[Aly & Rebecca in Milan](#) Day 6 Saturday April 7 Milan - Darfo Boario Terme - 18 Black Pordenone - 181 Falconara 182 182 Summary by Kelley & Emilee Ciao Bella from Falconara (with a thick Italian accent and flamboyant hand gestures). Here is your much needed and much anticipated update from the 18-2s. For the past three days, we have been getting into all sorts of adventures \*cough, cough, trouble.\* Thursday we arrived in beautiful Ancona on the train, hopped into Mercedes mini vans with two Italian guys who did not speak a stitch of English; little did we know that at the end of our stint we would be hugging them goodbye after our 30 minute drive. We arrived at the Natural Village and we're instantly spotted as foreigners....maybe the blonde and red hair gave it away. We played two matches that night in some dome-like structures. The second match (Jesolo, Italy-near Venice) was especially intense but we pulled it out in the third.

Sweaty and coming down from our adrenaline high, we found ourselves coming back to a hoppin dance party and dinner. When we hit the floor we quickly found out they have a choreographed dance to everything. Unfortunately we didn't pick up the dance moves that easily....a lot of awkward hip thrusting. When we requested an American song, we cleared out the dance floor. And, if that didn't have all the Italians running for the door, our karaoke sure did the trick. I think we have beautiful voices, actually.

The next morning we played around 10am...honestly....don't really remember the match. Our next match was at 6pm, so we went back to our cabanas with one thing in mind-the beach.

For a couple of hours we lounged in the sun on the beach and waded in the water. After we played ping pong with Mr. VanWinkle and Duy (Maggie's boyfriend), Emilee stepped on a nail...don't worry, her tetanus is up to date.

The second match we handled well and headed back for another dance party. Little did we know there were going to be a few boys teams there that night. But, I won't tell you about the rest of the night-because what happens in Falconara, stays in Falconara.

This morning, against the Serbians, We came into the match undefeated. They played a little different than the Italians but we pulled it out in two, which put us in the championship match. We had a few hours to relax before the match and had a rousing match of ping pong.

We arrived at the Rossellini complex in Ancona and were surprised at the size of it-similar to the milkhouse in Orlando...but bigger. After quite a lengthy introduction by the announcer who was violently yelling into the mic a centimeter from his mouth, the match started as we played in

front of hundreds. There was a little section in the nose bleeds that chanted "USA" for us occasionally, which was enough for us along with our three biggest fans (Mr and Mrs VanWinkle and Duy).

We ended it in two and are now international champions! After the awards ceremony we had a bite to eat and are hanging out in the cabanas. Can't wait to go to the Italian mass and San Marino tomorrow! Happy Easter and Ciao. Your 18-2s.

Editor's Note: Emilee Gutzmeier was selected for the All Tournament team. The 18-2 team is the first NL team to win one of these Easter Tournaments in Italy. Congratulations to them!



18-Black Summary by: Paige Smith Today we woke up in Milan and had a custard full breakfast. Then got on a private bus and headed off to Boario Terme. We arrived about three hours later to a beautiful town full of Mountains and pretty buildings. First thing we did was have a three course lunch which was very filling. Then all of us girls and some parents walked around and bought some fresh fruit. After walking around we got on the bus and went to the gym to play our match against an Italian team. We won all four games and played pretty good. Then we went and got some more fruit from a local store. Then went back to our hotel were we had three course meal for dinner and the dessert was to die for and then we went to bed. Everyone misses their family and says Happy Easter ! Editor's Note about 181

181 played the English Jr National team today and won in 3 sets the last one being 27-25. They then played an Italian team which they beat in 2 sets. Their last match of the day was against the Dutch Jr National team which we lost in 3 sets. They are 2nd in their pool and advance to the top 8 in the tournament.

[Pictures from Day 6](#)

[183 playing a friendly match](#)  
[Ashley P talks about Darfo Boario Terme](#)

Day 7 Sunday April 8  
Pordenone – 181  
San Marino – 182  
Darfo Boario Terme - 18 Black

18-Black Summary by: Lindsey Ryan & Melissa VanBenthuyzen

18-Black started out the day fantastic by sleeping in until 9, and receiving a surprise gift of chocolates from the Easter bunny, (wink wink nudge nudge-Curt). Then we enjoyed a delicious breakfast of carbs, carbs, and more carbs.

After eating, Aly, Paige, Kathy, and Lynne walked to a church for a beautiful, Italian, Catholic Easter service. Meanwhile, the rest of the girls lounged around in their rooms and on the balcony with a view of the mountains. Lunch was at 12:30, where we ate salad, pasta, chicken, and peaches.

Next we headed off to the gym in full warm-ups, looking pretty intimidating for our 3:30 match. The gym was large with only one court and lots of room for fans. We found out very quickly that the refs here are very strict on doubles and lifts...yikes. First we played an Italian team that we should have beat but...no comment. Then we played another Italian team that was much bigger and stronger. We fought hard, and it was a close and fun match, but ended with a frustrating loss.

After a quick meeting at the hotel, we had an hour or so to get ready for dinner. All of the girls got dressed up very cute for our last night on the town. The restaurant at Albergo Aprica served us salad, lasagna, French fries, pork, and tiramisu with acqua naturale.

Apparently the four course meal did not fill our stomachs enough because afterwards we went to a small gelato shop in town, compliments of Curt. Thanks Curt!! Now we're all getting ready for bed so we can be well-rested for our 9:00 match tomorrow morning and our last full day in Italy. Wish us luck, and see you soon! Editor's Note about 181

The 181 team won their first match of day which was the quarter finals against a Swedish team. It was a close 5 set match. This advanced them to the Semi Finals against the Slovenian Jr National team who they had scrimmaged on Friday. The match was a very emotional one. We won the first, lost the second & third, won the fourth 28-26, and won the fifth 21-19. Dave said they had an opportunity for 7 match points before Abby Wolpern had a huge block against the Slovenian #1 outside hitter. They will now be playing in the finals on Monday against the Dutch Jr National team, the team we hosted last year, and who beat us in pool play earlier. It's going to be a big reunion! Tonight they have the player's party....should be interesting. Editor's Note about 182

The 18-2's woke up today and headed off to an Easter church service. After the service they went

via bus to San Marino. Jackie said it was really beautiful but unfortunately it was cold and raining so that was disappointing. But the team still had fun, and Maggie's boyfriend proposed to her in San Marino.....she accepted. [Pictures from Day 7](#)[Rebecca & Steph at the Gelato shop](#) Day 8 Monday 4-9181 Pordenone - playing in finals182 touring Venice183 Boario Terme - playing 18-Black Summary by: Alex Berger

Today was unfortunately our last day ): We had a bright and early start at what felt like the crack of dawn. But really it was 7:00. We had the usual, carb breakfast with a coffee on the side. As all of us were enjoying the lovely food, we realized Aly and Lindsey were absent because they set their alarm for the PM not the AM. After breakfast we bolted into our rooms to change because we had about 5 minutes before we were going to go play. We loaded up our buses, and were on our way.

When we got the gym, all of us felt like we took a polar plunge into the arena. As we started to serve and pass, we realized how bloody cold the gym was. We proceeded to warm up, and at 8:40, we realized that there wasn't a team there. We kept warming up and when the team showed up, they didn't have balls. So we graciously lent the team half of our volleyballs. The start of the match was rough. I mean.. rough. We won, but it was a win where you really didn't feel like you won, but you did. The next game was better. Still probably not up to our par, but we got the job done. After we won the match, we gathered up our gear and headed back to the hotel to relax because we had five and a half hours to relax.

Some of us, took naps and others did some homework and just relaxed. While relaxing before lunch, we realized that the power went out. Not just electricity, but water too. As we made our way down for lunch at 12:30, we nervously waited to hear, if the food would be prepared for us to have even without electricity. The owner of the hotel graciously headed us towards the main dining room where we ate in a no lighted room (thank goodness it wasn't a cloudy day outside or we wouldn't have been able to see our food). We ate a big salad, spaghetti, and then mashed potatoes and turkey. It was all pretty delicious. But desert trumped it all. Vanilla gelato with a berry sauce over it... It was delicious. We asked for seconds but Ro wouldn't let us get it. After lunch we went back to our rooms and hung out some more before we played. Just like earlier, some slept, others did homework, and some just hung out.

At three twenty, we were all abruptly packing our things because since the power was out, we were just going to leave early and not stay to shower. We loaded all of our bags into our Mercedes Benz bus and were on our way to play the Austrian team. When we arrived, there was another match going on so we just warmed up on the sidelines. Once our match was up, we were eager and ready to play. We felt like we had a lot to prove, and we did. We came out aggressive and ready to play. They were very good though. The first game we pulled a win out but still felt like we had more to prove. The second game we laid it all out on the court. We finally played how we know we can play and won with confidence and pride. After the game, we got to trade shirts with the Austrian team! They were pretty cool people. The oldest player on the team was seventeen.

As we were ready to head out, we were halted because the teams that we had played today wanted to take a picture with us and get our information to add us on facebook. After all of the

pictures they had a cute little award ceremony for us four teams. As each team went up one by one the others clapped and cheered. Once we went up, it was really neat because they started to cheer USA and it made us all feel pretty special. We got some pretty neat stuff. We got a book about local things and neat pictures, some tea and a bunch of snacks, water bottles, and sweet t-shirts. After taking one massive picture with all four teams, we sprinted into the locker room to shower before we got on the bus.

We all took literally three minute showers and dried ourselves off with a t-shirt or our jerseys since we couldn't take a towel from the hotel. After we changed and got ready to hit the bus, we chowed down on some crackers and iced tea. Then we loaded up the bus and were on our way. We stopped at this delicious pizzeria where we had a full pizza to ourselves and it was made in roughly 90 seconds. It was absolutely amazing. After dinner, we loaded up the bus and got on our way back to Venice where we are staying for the night.

I think I can speak for everyone when I say this is the best experience that has happened to us! It is unforgettable and a once in a lifetime opportunity! Editor's Note about 181:

The 181 team was in the finals of their tournament today. They played the Dutch Jr National Team in the big arena. They ended up losing 3-0 in a 5 set match. Cory said it was a good match and the Dutch were just bigger and stronger. This is the 3rd time we have been in the finals of this tournament, and the 3rd time we have placed 2nd.....maybe next year. Julianne Blomberg was named Miss Tournament and Taylor Lockett was named best blocker. Editor's Note about 182:

The 18-2's got up early and took a train from their tournament location in Ancona to Venice. Along the way they dropped off their luggage with the hotel and then zipped into Venice. There they shopped for about 5 hours and then had a final team dinner. They had a great time.

[Pictures from Day 8](#)