

Spin alignment measurements of the $K^{*0}(892)$ and $\phi(1020)$ vector mesons in heavy ion collisions at $\sqrt{s_{NN}}=200$ GeV

B.I. Abelev,¹⁰ M.M. Aggarwal,³² Z. Ahammed,⁴⁷ B.D. Anderson,²¹ D. Arkhipkin,¹⁴ G.S. Averichev,¹³ Y. Bai,³⁰ J. Balewski,²⁵ O. Barannikova,¹⁰ L.S. Barnby,² J. Baudot,¹⁹ S. Baumgart,⁵² D.R. Beavis,³ R. Bellwied,⁵⁰ F. Benedosso,³⁰ R.R. Betts,¹⁰ S. Bhardwaj,³⁷ A. Bhasin,²⁰ A.K. Bhati,³² H. Bichsel,⁴⁹ J. Bielcik,¹² J. Bielcikova,¹² B. Biritz,⁷ L.C. Bland,³ M. Bombara,² B.E. Bonner,³⁸ M. Botje,³⁰ J. Bouchet,²¹ E. Braidot,³⁰ A.V. Brandin,²⁸ S. Bueltmann,³ T.P. Burton,² M. Bystersky,¹² X.Z. Cai,⁴¹ H. Caines,⁵² M. Calderón de la Barca Sánchez,⁶ J. Callner,¹⁰ O. Catu,⁵² D. Cebra,⁶ R. Cendejas,⁷ M.C. Cervantes,⁴³ Z. Chajecski,³¹ P. Chaloupka,¹² S. Chattopadhyay,⁴⁷ H.F. Chen,⁴⁰ J.H. Chen,⁴¹ J.Y. Chen,⁵¹ J. Cheng,⁴⁵ M. Cherney,¹¹ A. Chikhanian,⁵² K.E. Choi,³⁶ W. Christie,³ S.U. Chung,³ R.F. Clarke,⁴³ M.J.M. Coddington,⁴³ J.P. Coffin,¹⁹ T.M. Cormier,⁵⁰ M.R. Cosentino,³⁹ J.G. Cramer,⁴⁹ H.J. Crawford,⁵ D. Das,⁶ S. Dash,¹⁶ M. Daugherty,⁴⁴ M.M. de Moura,³⁹ T.G. Dedovich,¹³ M. DePhillips,³ A.A. Derevschikov,³⁴ R. Derradi de Souza,⁸ L. Didenko,³ T. Dietel,¹⁵ P. Djawotho,¹⁸ S.M. Dogra,²⁰ X. Dong,²⁴ J.L. Drachenberg,⁴³ J.E. Draper,⁶ F. Du,⁵² J.C. Dunlop,³ M.R. Dutta Mazumdar,⁴⁷ W.R. Edwards,²⁴ L.G. Efimov,¹³ E. Elhalhuli,² M. Elnimr,⁵⁰ V. Emelianov,²⁸ J. Engelage,⁵ G. Eppley,³⁸ B. Erasmus,⁴² M. Estienne,¹⁹ L. Eun,³³ P. Fachini,³ R. Fatemi,²² J. Fedorisin,¹³ A. Feng,⁵¹ P. Filip,¹⁴ E. Finch,⁵² V. Fine,³ Y. Fisyak,³ C.A. Gagliardi,⁴³ L. Gaillard,² D.R. Gangadharan,⁷ M.S. Ganti,⁴⁷ E. Garcia-Solis,¹⁰ V. Ghazikhanian,⁷ P. Ghosh,⁴⁷ Y.N. Gorbunov,¹¹ A. Gordon,³ O. Grebenyuk,³⁰ D. Grosnick,⁴⁶ B. Grube,³⁶ S.M. Guertin,⁷ K.S.F.F. Guimaraes,³⁹ A. Gupta,²⁰ N. Gupta,²⁰ W. Guryn,³ B. Haag,⁶ T.J. Hallman,³ A. Hamed,⁴³ J.W. Harris,⁵² W. He,¹⁸ M. Heinz,⁵² S. Heppelmann,³³ B. Hippolyte,¹⁹ A. Hirsch,³⁵ A.M. Hoffman,²⁵ G.W. Hoffmann,⁴⁴ D.J. Hofman,¹⁰ R.S. Hollis,¹⁰ H.Z. Huang,⁷ E.W. Hughes,⁴ T.J. Humanic,³¹ G. Igo,⁷ A. Iordanova,¹⁰ P. Jacobs,²⁴ W.W. Jacobs,¹⁸ P. Jakl,¹² F. Jin,⁴¹ P.G. Jones,² E.G. Judd,⁵ S. Kabana,⁴² K. Kajimoto,⁴⁴ K. Kang,⁴⁵ J. Kapitan,¹² M. Kaplan,⁹ D. Keane,²¹ A. Kechechyan,¹³ D. Kettler,⁴⁹ V.Yu. Khodyrev,³⁴ J. Kiryluk,²⁴ A. Kisiel,³¹ S.R. Klein,²⁴ A.G. Knospe,⁵² A. Kocoloski,²⁵ D.D. Koetke,⁴⁶ T. Kollegger,¹⁵ M. Kopytine,²¹ L. Kotchenda,²⁸ V. Kouchpil,¹² P. Kravtsov,²⁸ V.I. Kravtsov,³⁴ K. Krueger,¹ C. Kuhn,¹⁹ A. Kumar,³² L. Kumar,³² P. Kurnadi,⁷ M.A.C. Lamont,³ J.M. Landgraf,³ S. Lange,¹⁵ S. LaPointe,⁵⁰ F. Laue,³ J. Lauret,³ A. Lebedev,³ R. Lednicky,¹⁴ C-H. Lee,³⁶ M.J. LeVine,³ C. Li,⁴⁰ Y. Li,⁴⁵ G. Lin,⁵² X. Lin,⁵¹ S.J. Lindenbaum,²⁹ M.A. Lisa,³¹ F. Liu,⁵¹ H. Liu,⁴⁰ J. Liu,³⁸ L. Liu,⁵¹ T. Ljubicic,³ W.J. Llope,³⁸ R.S. Longacre,³ W.A. Love,³ Y. Lu,⁴⁰ T. Ludlam,³ D. Lynn,³ G.L. Ma,⁴¹ J.G. Ma,⁷ Y.G. Ma,⁴¹ D.P. Mahapatra,¹⁶ R. Majka,⁵² L.K. Mangotra,²⁰ R. Manweiler,⁴⁶ S. Margetis,²¹ C. Markert,⁴⁴ H.S. Matis,²⁴ Yu.A. Matulenko,³⁴ T.S. McShane,¹¹ A. Meschanin,³⁴ J. Millane,²⁵ M.L. Miller,²⁵ N.G. Minaev,³⁴ S. Mioduszewski,⁴³ A. Mischke,³⁰ J. Mitchell,³⁸ B. Mohanty,⁴⁷ D.A. Morozov,³⁴ M.G. Munhoz,³⁹ B.K. Nandi,¹⁷ C. Nattrass,⁵² T.K. Nayak,⁴⁷ J.M. Nelson,² C. Nepali,²¹ P.K. Netrakanti,³⁵ M.J. Ng,⁵ L.V. Nogach,³⁴ S.B. Nurushev,³⁴ G. Odyniec,²⁴ A. Ogawa,³ H. Okada,³ V. Okorokov,²⁸ D. Olson,²⁴ M. Pachr,¹² S.K. Pal,⁴⁷ Y. Panebratsev,¹³ T. Pawlak,⁴⁸ T. Peitzmann,³⁰ V. Perevoztchikov,³ C. Perkins,⁵ W. Peryt,⁴⁸ S.C. Phatak,¹⁶ M. Planinic,⁵³ J. Pluta,⁴⁸ N. Poljak,⁵³ N. Porile,³⁵ A.M. Poskanzer,²⁴ M. Potekhin,³ B.V.K.S. Potukuchi,²⁰ D. Prindle,⁴⁹ C. Pruneau,⁵⁰ N.K. Pruthi,³² J. Putschke,⁵² I.A. Qattan,¹⁸ R. Raniwala,³⁷ S. Raniwala,³⁷ R.L. Ray,⁴⁴ A. Ridiger,²⁸ H.G. Ritter,²⁴ J.B. Roberts,³⁸ O.V. Rogachevskiy,¹³ J.L. Romero,⁶ A. Rose,²⁴ C. Roy,⁴² L. Ruan,³ M.J. Russcher,³⁰ V. Rykov,²¹ R. Sahoo,⁴² I. Sakrejda,²⁴ T. Sakuma,²⁵ S. Salur,²⁴ J. Sandweiss,⁵² M. Sarsour,⁴³ J. Schambach,⁴⁴ R.P. Scharenberg,³⁵ N. Schmitz,²⁶ J. Seger,¹¹ I. Selyuzhenkov,¹⁸ P. Seyboth,²⁶ A. Shabetai,¹⁹ E. Shahaliev,¹³ M. Shao,⁴⁰ M. Sharma,⁵⁰ S.S. Shi,⁵¹ X-H. Shi,⁴¹ E.P. Sichtermann,²⁴ F. Simon,²⁶ R.N. Singaraju,⁴⁷ M.J. Skoby,³⁵ N. Smirnov,⁵² R. Snellings,³⁰ P. Sorensen,³ J. Sowinski,¹⁸ H.M. Spinka,¹ B. Srivastava,³⁵ A. Stadnik,¹³ T.D.S. Stanislaus,⁴⁶ D. Staszak,⁷ R. Stock,¹⁵ M. Strikhanov,²⁸ B. Stringfellow,³⁵ A.A.P. Suaide,³⁹ M.C. Suarez,¹⁰ N.L. Subba,²¹ M. Sumbera,¹² X.M. Sun,²⁴ Z. Sun,²³ B. Surrow,²⁵ T.J.M. Symons,²⁴ A. Szanto de Toledo,³⁹ J. Takahashi,⁸ A.H. Tang,³ Z. Tang,⁴⁰ T. Tarnowsky,³⁵ D. Thein,⁴⁴ J.H. Thomas,²⁴ J. Tian,⁴¹ A.R. Timmins,² S. Timoshenko,²⁸ M. Tokarev,¹³ T.A. Trainor,⁴⁹ V.N. Tram,²⁴ A.L. Trattner,⁵ S. Trentalange,⁷ R.E. Tribble,⁴³ O.D. Tsai,⁷ J. Ulery,³⁵ T. Ullrich,³ D.G. Underwood,¹ G. Van Buren,³ N. van der Kolk,³⁰ M. van Leeuwen,³⁰ A.M. Vander Molen,²⁷ R. Varma,¹⁷ G.M.S. Vasconcelos,⁸ I.M. Vasilevski,¹⁴ A.N. Vasiliev,³⁴ F. Videbaek,³ S.E. Vigdor,¹⁸ Y.P. Viyogi,¹⁶ S. Vokal,¹³ S.A. Voloshin,⁵⁰ M. Wada,⁴⁴ W.T. Waggoner,¹¹ F. Wang,³⁵ G. Wang,⁷ J.S. Wang,²³ Q. Wang,³⁵ X. Wang,⁴⁵ X.L. Wang,⁴⁰ Y. Wang,⁴⁵ J.C. Webb,⁴⁶ G.D. Westfall,²⁷ C. Whitten Jr.,⁷ H. Wieman,²⁴ S.W. Wissink,¹⁸ R. Witt,⁵² J. Wu,⁴⁰ Y. Wu,⁵¹ N. Xu,²⁴ Q.H. Xu,²⁴ Z. Xu,³ P. Yepes,³⁸ I-K. Yoo,³⁶ Q. Yue,⁴⁵ M. Zawisza,⁴⁸ H. Zbroszczyk,⁴⁸ W. Zhan,²³ H. Zhang,³ S. Zhang,⁴¹ W.M. Zhang,²¹ Y. Zhang,⁴⁰ Z.P. Zhang,⁴⁰ Y. Zhao,⁴⁰ C. Zhong,⁴¹ J. Zhou,³⁸ R. Zoukarneev,¹⁴ Y. Zoukarneeva,¹⁴ and J.X. Zuo⁴¹

(STAR Collaboration)

- ¹Argonne National Laboratory, Argonne, Illinois 60439
²University of Birmingham, Birmingham, United Kingdom
³Brookhaven National Laboratory, Upton, New York 11973
⁴California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, California 91125
⁵University of California, Berkeley, California 94720
⁶University of California, Davis, California 95616
⁷University of California, Los Angeles, California 90095
⁸Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Sao Paulo, Brazil
⁹Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15213
¹⁰University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, Illinois 60607
¹¹Creighton University, Omaha, Nebraska 68178
¹²Nuclear Physics Institute AS CR, 250 68 Řež/Prague, Czech Republic
¹³Laboratory for High Energy (JINR), Dubna, Russia
¹⁴Particle Physics Laboratory (JINR), Dubna, Russia
¹⁵University of Frankfurt, Frankfurt, Germany
¹⁶Institute of Physics, Bhubaneswar 751005, India
¹⁷Indian Institute of Technology, Mumbai, India
¹⁸Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana 47408
¹⁹Institut de Recherches Subatomiques, Strasbourg, France
²⁰University of Jammu, Jammu 180001, India
²¹Kent State University, Kent, Ohio 44242
²²University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky, 40506-0055
²³Institute of Modern Physics, Lanzhou, China
²⁴Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, Berkeley, California 94720
²⁵Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA 02139-4307
²⁶Max-Planck-Institut für Physik, Munich, Germany
²⁷Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan 48824
²⁸Moscow Engineering Physics Institute, Moscow Russia
²⁹City College of New York, New York City, New York 10031
³⁰NIKHEF and Utrecht University, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
³¹Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio 43210
³²Panjab University, Chandigarh 160014, India
³³Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania 16802
³⁴Institute of High Energy Physics, Protvino, Russia
³⁵Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana 47907
³⁶Pusan National University, Pusan, Republic of Korea
³⁷University of Rajasthan, Jaipur 302004, India
³⁸Rice University, Houston, Texas 77251
³⁹Universidade de Sao Paulo, Sao Paulo, Brazil
⁴⁰University of Science & Technology of China, Hefei 230026, China
⁴¹Shanghai Institute of Applied Physics, Shanghai 201800, China
⁴²SUBATECH, Nantes, France
⁴³Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas 77843
⁴⁴University of Texas, Austin, Texas 78712
⁴⁵Tsinghua University, Beijing 100084, China
⁴⁶Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, Indiana 46383
⁴⁷Variable Energy Cyclotron Centre, Kolkata 700064, India
⁴⁸Warsaw University of Technology, Warsaw, Poland
⁴⁹University of Washington, Seattle, Washington 98195
⁵⁰Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan 48201
⁵¹Institute of Particle Physics, CCNU (HZNU), Wuhan 430079, China
⁵²Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut 06520
⁵³University of Zagreb, Zagreb, HR-10002, Croatia

We present the first spin alignment measurements for the $K^{*0}(892)$ and $\phi(1020)$ vector mesons produced at mid-rapidity with transverse momenta up to 5 GeV/c at $\sqrt{s_{NN}} = 200$ GeV at RHIC. The diagonal spin density matrix elements with respect to the reaction plane in Au+Au collisions are $\rho_{00} = 0.32 \pm 0.04$ (stat) ± 0.09 (syst) for the K^{*0} ($0.8 < p_T < 5.0$ GeV/c) and $\rho_{00} = 0.34 \pm 0.02$ (stat) ± 0.03 (syst) for the ϕ ($0.4 < p_T < 5.0$ GeV/c), and are constant with transverse momentum and collision centrality. The data are consistent with the unpolarized expectation of 1/3 and thus no evidence is found for the transfer of the orbital angular momentum of the colliding system to the vector meson spins. Spin alignments for K^{*0} and ϕ in Au+Au collisions were also measured with respect to the particle's production plane. The ϕ result, $\rho_{00} = 0.41 \pm 0.02$ (stat) ± 0.04 (syst),

is consistent with that in p+p collisions, $\rho_{00} = 0.39 \pm 0.03$ (stat) ± 0.06 (syst), also measured in this work. The measurements thus constrain the possible size of polarization phenomena in the production dynamics of vector mesons.

PACS numbers: 24.70.+s, 25.75.Nq

Measurements of the polarization of the particles produced in relativistic heavy-ion collisions may provide new insights into the initial conditions and evolution of the nuclear system during the collision [1, 2, 3]. In particular, by studying the polarization magnitudes with respect to various kinematic planes one could attempt to discern the point in the evolution of the system at which the polarization arises and, hence, the dominant mechanisms involved. The planes that are relevant to this paper are the reaction plane, which is defined by the beam momentum and the nuclear impact parameter, and the particle's production plane, which is defined by the beam momentum and the momentum of the produced particle.

In non-central relativistic heavy-ion collisions, transverse gradients of the total longitudinal momentum of the participant matter result in substantial local orbital angular momentum of the created partons [1]. Due to the spin-orbit coupling of QCD, this orbital motion may result in a net polarization of the produced particles along the direction of the initial angular momentum, that is, perpendicular to the reaction plane, yielding a global hadronic polarization in the final state [1, 4, 5]. The magnitude and the transverse momentum (p_T) dependence of the global polarization are therefore expected to be sensitive to different hadronization scenarios [6]. In particular, the proposed quark recombination model for hadronization of bulk partonic matter created at RHIC [7], which reproduces measurements in the intermediate p_T region ($2 < p_T < 5$ GeV/c) quite well [8], may be an effective dynamical mechanism for transferring polarization from quarks to vector mesons or hyperons.

One can study the polarization of final state hadrons with respect to the particle's production plane as well. Non-zero polarizations transverse to this plane are expected to be sensitive to particle formation dynamics and to possible intrinsic quark transverse spin distributions [9]. Because large production plane polarizations have been observed for hyperons in unpolarized p+p and p+A interactions [10] and for vector mesons in K+p, n+C, and e^+e^- interactions [11, 12, 13, 14], the disappearance of these effects in relativistic heavy-ion collisions might indicate that the system is isotropic to the extent that, locally, there is no longer a preferred direction [15]. It has also been suggested [16] that vector meson spin alignment with respect to the production plane is closely related to the single-spin left-right asymmetries in transversely polarized p+p collisions [17, 18, 19, 20].

We have recently measured the global (reaction plane) polarizations of Λ and $\bar{\Lambda}$ hyperons produced at mid-rapidity in Au+Au collisions at center-of-mass energies $\sqrt{s_{NN}} = 62.4$ GeV and 200 GeV [21]. The results, $|P_{\Lambda, \bar{\Lambda}}| \leq 0.02$, are well below the predictions of Ref. [1]

and are in agreement with the refined calculations of Ref. [4].

In this paper, we present the first measurements of the spin alignment for the K^{*0} and ϕ vector mesons with respect to both the reaction plane and the production plane in Au+Au collisions at $\sqrt{s_{NN}} = 200$ GeV. We present also the spin alignment of the ϕ meson with respect to its production plane for p+p collisions at the same collision energy. The K^{*0} data cover $0.8 < p_T < 5.0$ GeV/c and the ϕ data cover $0.4 < p_T < 5.0$ GeV/c.

Spin alignment is described by a spin density matrix ρ , a 3×3 Hermitian matrix with unit trace. A deviation of the diagonal elements ρ_{mm} ($m = -1, 0, 1$) from $1/3$ signals net spin alignment. Because vector mesons decay strongly, the diagonal elements ρ_{-1-1} and ρ_{11} are degenerate and ρ_{00} is the only independent observable. It can be determined from the angular distribution of the decay products [22],

$$\frac{dN}{d(\cos\theta^*)} = N_0 \times [(1 - \rho_{00}) + (3\rho_{00} - 1) \cos^2\theta^*], \quad (1)$$

where N_0 is the normalization and θ^* is the angle between the polarization direction \hat{n} and the momentum direction of a daughter particle in the rest frame of the parent vector meson. In the case of a global spin alignment measurement, the polarization direction \hat{n} is along the orbital angular momentum of the colliding system. It is determined by the reaction plane, requiring only the second order term since Eq.(1) is invariant under $\theta^* \rightarrow \pi + \theta^*$ [23]. For the production plane measurement, \hat{n} lies along the normal to the production plane, which is determined by the momentum of the vector meson and of the colliding beams.

Vector mesons are expected to originate predominantly from primordial production [24, 25], unlike hyperon production which is expected to have large resonance decay contributions [21, 24, 25]. Another difference between the present spin alignment measurement and our recent measurement of global hyperon polarization [21] is that contributions to a spin alignment measurement are generally additive, whereas contributions along a polarization direction may cancel. Last, as far as the reaction plane resolution is concerned, the aforementioned method has an advantage over the method used in Ref. [21], where the reaction plane was estimated in forward detectors.

A total of approximately 2.3×10^7 events from Au+Au data collection in the year 2004 run and 6.0×10^6 events from p+p data collection in the year 2001 run have been used in these analyses. The events were collected with minimum bias triggers [26, 27]. Charged tracks were reconstructed with the STAR Time Projection Chamber (TPC) for pseudo-rapidities $|\eta| < 1.0$ and all azimuthal

angles [28]. Particle identification is achieved by correlating the ionization energy loss (dE/dx) of charged particles in the TPC gas with their measured momenta. The measured $\langle dE/dx \rangle$ is reasonably well described by the Bichsel function smeared with a resolution of width σ [29]. By measuring the $\langle dE/dx \rangle$, pions and kaons could be identified up to a momentum of about 0.6 GeV/c while protons could be separated from pions and kaons up to a momentum of about 1.1 GeV/c. Tracks within 2σ of the pion/kaon Bichsel curve were selected in the analyses. The K^{*0} and ϕ mesons were reconstructed through their respective hadronic decay channels, $K^{*0} \rightarrow K^+\pi^-$, $\bar{K}^{*0} \rightarrow K^-\pi^+$ and $\phi \rightarrow K^+K^-$. The K^{*0} and \bar{K}^{*0} samples were combined to enhance the statistics and the term K^{*0} in the remainder of this paper will refer to the combined sample. The collision centrality was determined by the charged hadron multiplicity within $|\eta| < 0.5$. The same analysis techniques have been used in our earlier measurements of K^{*0} and ϕ production [26, 27].

Figure 1 illustrates aspects of the data and analysis for particular p_T bins. The top panels show the invariant mass distributions for (a) K^{*0} and (b) ϕ candidates in mid-central (20-60%) Au+Au collisions at $\sqrt{s_{NN}} = 200$ GeV including all values of $\cos\theta^*$. In these analyses invariant mass distributions were obtained for K^{*0} and ϕ for each $\cos\theta^*$ and p_T interval. The raw K^{*0} and ϕ yields in each of these distributions were obtained by subtracting the corresponding combinatorial backgrounds and fitting the remaining distributions with a Breit-Wigner function plus a polynomial curve to describe the residual background. The raw yields were then corrected for detection efficiency and acceptance determined from Monte Carlo GEANT simulations [26, 27]. The middle panels in Fig. 1 show the $\cos\theta^*$ distributions, after efficiency and acceptance corrections, for the (c) K^{*0} and (d) ϕ , respectively. Eq. (1) was fitted to these distributions to determine $\rho_{00}(p_T)$. In the analyses, we used charged particle tracks with $0.2 < p_T < 2.0$ GeV/c and pseudo-rapidity $|\eta| < 1.0$ originating from the primary interaction vertex to reconstruct the event plane as an estimate of the reaction plane [30]. Tracks associated with a K^{*0} or a ϕ candidate are explicitly excluded from the event plane calculation. The results for $\rho_{00}(p_T)$ were corrected for the finite event plane resolution, which was determined by correlating two random sub-events. The correction factor on $(3\rho_{00} - 1)$ is determined to be $1/0.81$ in 20-60% Au+Au collisions at $\sqrt{s_{NN}} = 200$ GeV [30]. The bottom panel (e), (f), (g) represents the $\cos\theta^*$ distribution for K^{*0} and ϕ mesons with respect to the production plane in Au+Au and p+p collisions. In this case, $\rho_{00}(p_T)$ is extracted directly by fitting Eq. (1) to the distributions. We have checked our analysis procedure by extracting ρ_{00} for the abundantly produced, but spin-less K_S^0 meson ($J^P = 0^-$). The results are shown in panel (h) and are consistent with $1/3$ within the statistical uncertainties, as expected. The χ^2/ndf value is unsatisfactory for the K_S^0 fit for $0.4 < p_T < 0.8$ GeV/c, which is indicative of point-to-point systematics. It reaches satisfactory

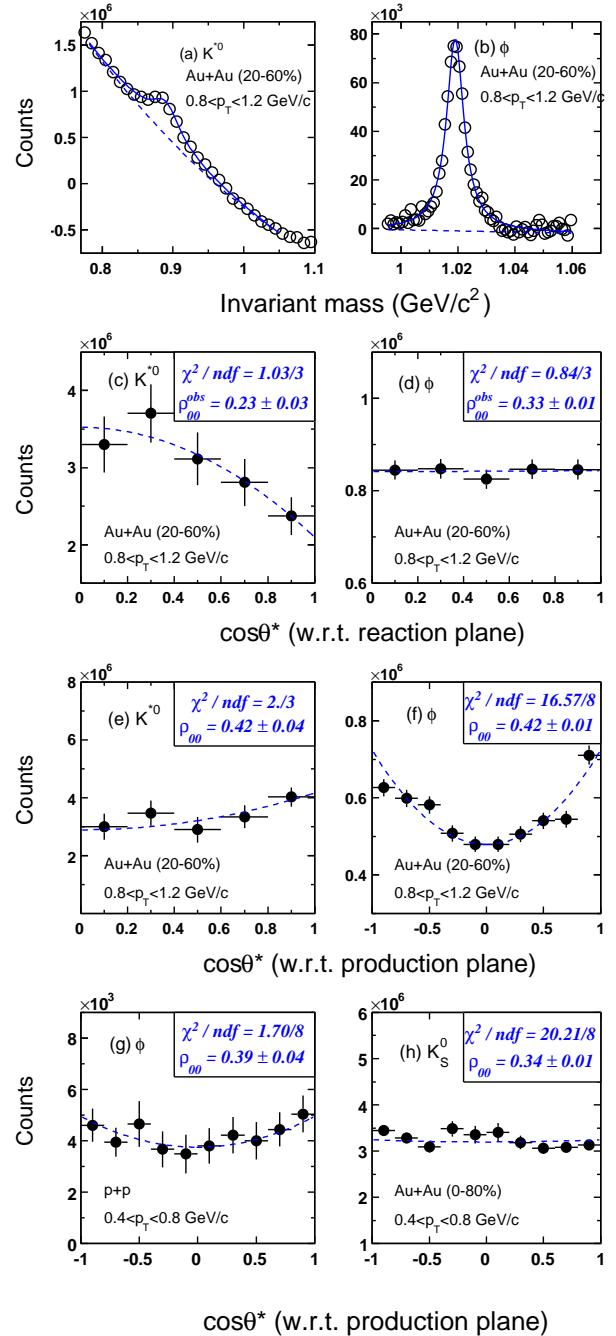


FIG. 1: (color online) The invariant mass distribution after combinatorial background subtraction for (a) the K^{*0} and (b) the ϕ meson in mid-central Au+Au collisions at $\sqrt{s_{NN}} = 200$ GeV including all values of $\cos\theta^*$. The continuous lines represent fits of signal, described with a Breit-Wigner function, and residual background, described with the dashed polynomial curves. Panel (c), (e) and panel (d), (f) represent the $\cos\theta^*$ distributions for the K^{*0} and ϕ yields in Au+Au collisions, respectively. Panel (g) is the ϕ yield in p+p collisions while panel (h) shows the control measurement of the spin-less K_S^0 meson $\cos\theta^*$ distribution. The error bars show statistical uncertainties. The blue dashed lines in (c)-(h) are fits of Eq. (1) to the data.

TABLE I: The averaged spin density matrix elements ρ_{00} with respect to the reaction plane in mid-central Au+Au collisions at $\sqrt{s_{NN}} = 200$ GeV.

	K^{*0}	ϕ
$\rho_{00}(p_T < 2.0 \text{ GeV}/c)$	$0.31 \pm 0.04 \pm 0.09$	$0.33 \pm 0.01 \pm 0.03$
$\rho_{00}(p_T > 2.0 \text{ GeV}/c)$	$0.37 \pm 0.04 \pm 0.09$	$0.35 \pm 0.04 \pm 0.05$
$\rho_{00}(p_T < 5.0 \text{ GeV}/c)$	$0.32 \pm 0.03 \pm 0.09$	$0.34 \pm 0.02 \pm 0.03$

values at larger p_T .

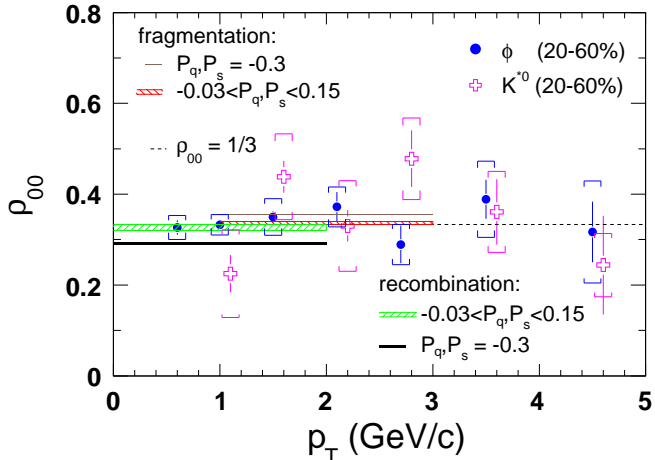


FIG. 2: (color online) The spin density matrix elements ρ_{00} with respect to the reaction plane in mid-central Au+Au collisions at $\sqrt{s_{NN}} = 200$ GeV versus p_T of the vector meson. The sizes of the statistical uncertainties are indicated by error bars, and the systematic uncertainties by caps. The K^{*0} data points have been shifted slightly in p_T for clarity. The dashed horizontal line indicates the unpolarized expectation $\rho_{00} = 1/3$. The bands and continuous horizontal lines show predictions discussed in the text.

The measurements of the K^{*0} and ϕ global spin alignment versus p_T of the vector meson for mid-central Au+Au collisions at $\sqrt{s_{NN}} = 200$ GeV are presented in Fig. 2, and are summarized in Table I. Both statistical and systematic uncertainties are shown. The dominant contribution to the systematic uncertainty for the ϕ (K^{*0}) meson ranges from 0.020 (0.05) to 0.045 (0.10), originating from uncertainty in the magnitude and shape of the residual background after the subtraction of combinatorial background. This residual arises from the incomplete description of combinatorial background via the event mixing technique and from distortions to the background in the invariant mass distribution near the ϕ peak caused by photon conversions and other correlated backgrounds such as $K^{*0} \rightarrow K^+\pi^-$, $\rho^0 \rightarrow \pi^+\pi^-$, $\Lambda \rightarrow p\pi^-$ and $\Delta \rightarrow N\pi$ decays [31]. In the case of the K^{*0} these backgrounds include $K_S^0 \rightarrow \pi^+\pi^-$, $\rho^0 \rightarrow \pi^+\pi^-$, $\phi \rightarrow K^+K^-$, $\Lambda \rightarrow p\pi^-$ and $\Delta \rightarrow N\pi$ decays [32]. Other point-to-point systematic uncertainty associated with particle identification for the ϕ (K^{*0}) meson were

estimated to range from 0.007 (0.06) to 0.012 (0.09) by tightening the K^\pm (π and K) $\langle dE/dx \rangle$ cut from 2σ to 1σ . An additional sizable contribution to the ϕ uncertainty was estimated to range from 0.007 to 0.012 by varying the fitted invariant mass range from 1.00–1.04 GeV/c^2 to 1.00–1.06 GeV/c^2 , and to the K^{*0} uncertainty ranging from 0.02 to 0.05 by changing its analyzed rapidity range from $|y| < 1$ to $|y| < 0.5$. The systematic uncertainties in the K^{*0} measurements are larger than those in the ϕ measurement mainly because of the lower signal-to-background ratio of $\sim 1/1000$ compared to $\sim 1/25$ for the ϕ meson. The contributions to the systematic uncertainty caused by elliptic flow effects and the event plane resolution are found to be negligible. The K^{*0} and ϕ data are consistent with each other and are consistent with $1/3$ at all p_T .

Hadronization of globally polarized thermal quarks, typically having $p_T < 1 \text{ GeV}/c$, in mid-central Au+Au collisions is predicted to cause p_T dependent deviations of ρ_{00} from the unpolarized value of $1/3$ [1, 4, 6, 33]. Recombination of polarized thermal quarks and anti-quarks is expected to dominate for $p_T < 2 \text{ GeV}/c$ and leads to values of $\rho_{00} < 1/3$ as indicated in Fig. 2 for a typical range of expected light (strange) quark polarizations $P_{q(s)}$ [6]. The fragmentation of polarized thermal quarks with larger p_T , however, would lead to values of $\rho_{00} > 1/3$ for $1 < p_T < 3 \text{ GeV}/c$ [6, 33], which is indicated as well. In the region of $1 < p_T < 2 \text{ GeV}/c$ both hadronization mechanisms could occur and their effects on ρ_{00} may cancel. As observed in Fig. 2 these effects are predicted to be smaller than our experiment sensitivity. However, the large (strange) quark polarization, $P_{q,s} = -0.3$, considered in the recombination scenario of Ref. [1] results in worse agreement of ρ_{00} with our ϕ data than $-0.03 < P_{q,s} < 0.15$ discussed in Ref. [4]. Our data are consistent with the unpolarized expectation $\rho_{00} = 1/3$. Recent measurement of the Λ and $\bar{\Lambda}$ global polarization also found no significant polarization and an upper limit, $|P_{\Lambda, \bar{\Lambda}}| \leq 0.02$, was obtained [21].

The centrality dependence of the global spin alignment measurements for K^{*0} and ϕ vector mesons with low and intermediate p_T is shown in Fig. 3. The orbital angular momentum of the colliding system depends strongly on the collision centrality. Global polarization is predicted to be vanishingly small in central collisions and to increase almost linearly with impact parameter in semi-central collisions due to increasing particle angular momentum along with effects of spin-orbit coupling in QCD [1]. The data exhibit no significant spin alignment at any collision centrality and thus can constrain the possible size of spin-orbit couplings.

Figure 4 and Table II present the K^{*0} and ϕ spin alignment measurements with respect to the production plane in mid-central Au+Au collisions at $\sqrt{s_{NN}} = 200$ GeV together with the ϕ meson results in p+p collisions at the same incident energy. As is the case for our measurements with respect to the reaction plane, the uncertainties in the measurement with respect to the production

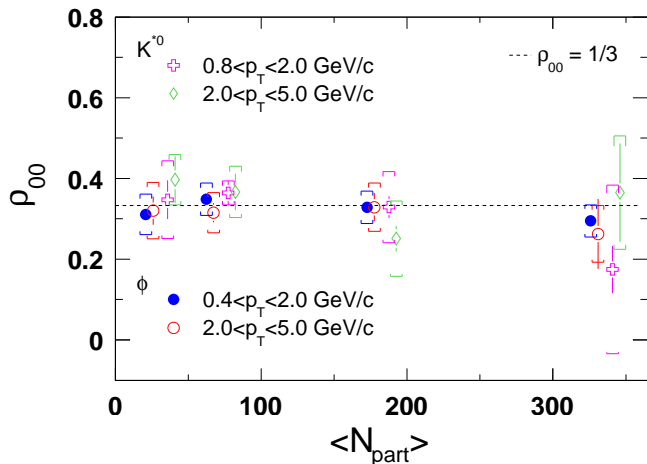


FIG. 3: (color online) The dependence of ρ_{00} with respect to the reaction plane on the number of participants at mid-rapidity in Au+Au collisions at $\sqrt{s_{NN}} = 200$ GeV. The sizes of the statistical uncertainties are indicated by error bars, and the systematic uncertainties by caps. The ϕ data for $p_T > 2$ GeV/c and the K^{*0} data points have been shifted slightly in $\langle N_{part} \rangle$ for clarity. The dashed horizontal line indicates the unpolarized expectation $\rho_{00} = 1/3$.

plane are smaller for the ϕ than for the K^{*0} meson, and the statistical uncertainties are somewhat smaller than the systematic uncertainty estimates. The ϕ point-to-point systematic uncertainty estimate includes a dominant contribution ranging from 0.030 to 0.045 due to residual background plus two smaller contributions of 0.006–0.012 and 0.005–0.010 estimated by varying the K^\pm identification cut on $\langle dE/dx \rangle$ from 2σ to 1σ and the fit range of the ϕ meson invariant mass from 1.00–1.04 GeV/ c^2 to 1.00–1.06 GeV/ c^2 . For the K^{*0} we estimate a residual background contribution to the point-to-point systematic uncertainty ranging from 0.02 to 0.08 and about equal contributions ranging from 0.01 to 0.08 by varying particle identification criteria and analyzed rapidity. The Au+Au data for ρ_{00} are consistent with $1/3$ to within 1–2 times the total uncertainties, though the central values tend to increase with decreasing p_T for $p_T < 2.0$ GeV/c. The p+p results are consistent with the Au+Au results and with $1/3$. No conclusive evidence is found for large polarization phenomena in the production dynamics of vector mesons in the covered kinematic region with the precision of current measurements. The p+p results are in qualitative agreement with the suggested relation of vector meson spin alignment with respect to the production plane and the null results observed for the transverse spin asymmetries in singly polarized p+p collisions at mid-rapidity [19, 20]. OPAL and DELPHI have previously reported similar null results for the spin alignment of the K^{*0} and ϕ mesons produced with small fractional momenta ($x_p \leq 0.3$, $x_p = p/p_{beam}$) in e^+e^- collisions [13, 14], though the production and fragmentation processes involved there are different from those at RHIC.

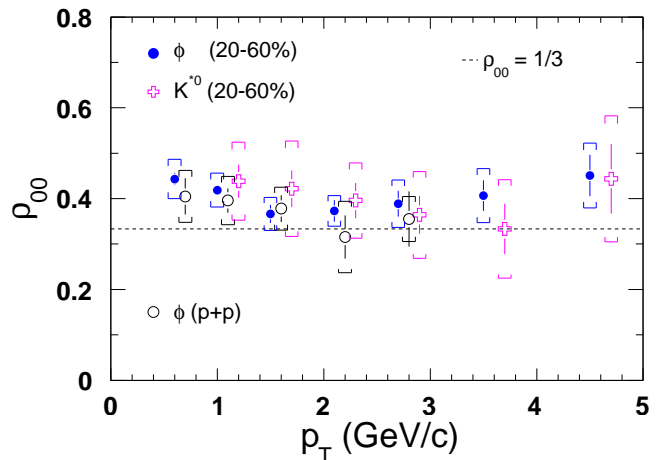


FIG. 4: (color online) The spin density matrix elements ρ_{00} with respect to the production plane in mid-central Au+Au and p+p collisions at $\sqrt{s_{NN}} = 200$ GeV versus p_T of the vector meson. The sizes of the statistical uncertainties are indicated by error bars, and the systematic uncertainties by caps. The K^{*0} and the ϕ p+p data points have been shifted slightly in p_T for clarity. The dashed horizontal line indicates the unpolarized expectation $\rho_{00} = 1/3$.

TABLE II: The averaged spin density matrix elements ρ_{00} with respect to the production plane in mid-central Au+Au collisions and the ϕ result in p+p collisions at $\sqrt{s_{NN}} = 200$ GeV.

	K^{*0}	ϕ
$\rho_{00}(p_T < 2.0 \text{ GeV}/c)$	$0.43 \pm 0.04 \pm 0.09$	$0.42 \pm 0.02 \pm 0.04$
$\rho_{00}(p_T > 2.0 \text{ GeV}/c)$	$0.38 \pm 0.04 \pm 0.09$	$0.38 \pm 0.03 \pm 0.05$
$\rho_{00}(p_T < 5.0 \text{ GeV}/c)$	$0.42 \pm 0.03 \pm 0.09$	$0.41 \pm 0.02 \pm 0.04$
$\rho_{00}(\text{p+p})$		$0.39 \pm 0.03 \pm 0.06$

In summary, we have presented the first measurements of spin alignment for K^{*0} and ϕ vector mesons at mid-rapidity at RHIC. The results for the diagonal spin density matrix element ρ_{00} with respect to the reaction plane in Au+Au collisions are found to be constant with p_T in the measured region, covering up to 5 GeV/c, and constant with centrality. The data are consistent with the unpolarized expectation of $1/3$ and thus provide no evidence for global spin alignment despite the large orbital angular momentum in non-central Au+Au collisions at RHIC. The results with respect to the production plane are found to be less than two standard deviations above $1/3$ in Au+Au collisions and are consistent with the results in p+p collisions at the same collisions energy. The measurements thus constrain the possible size of polarization phenomena in the production dynamics of vector mesons. Future measurements of polarization with respect to the jet production plane are complementary to the current measurements because they are not sensitive to the initial conditions and may probe the system's mean free path [2].

We thank the RHIC Operations Group and RCF at BNL, and the NERSC Center at LBNL and the resources provided by the Open Science Grid consortium for their support. This work was supported in part by the Offices of NP and HEP within the U.S. DOE Office of Science, the U.S. NSF, the Sloan Foundation, the BMBF of Germany, CNRS/IN2P3, RA, RPL, and EMN of France, EPSRC of the United Kingdom, FAPESP of Brazil, the

Russian Ministry of Sci. and Tech., the NNSFC, CAS, MoST and MoE of China, IRP and GA of the Czech Republic, FOM of the Netherlands, DAE, DST, and CSIR of the Government of India, Swiss NSF, the Polish State Committee for Scientific Research, Slovak Research and Development Agency, and the Korea Sci. & Eng. Foundation.

-
- [1] Z. Liang and X. Wang, *Phys. Rev. Lett.* **94**, 102301 (2005); Erratum: *ibid.*, **96**, 039901 (2006).
- [2] B. Betz et al., *Phys. Rev. C* **76**, 044901 (2007).
- [3] F. Becattini, F. Piccinini and J. Rizzo, *Phys. Rev. C* **77**, 024906 (2008).
- [4] Z. Liang, *J. Phys. G: Nucl. Part. Phys.* **34**, S323 (2007).
- [5] S. Voloshin, nucl-th/0410089.
- [6] Z. Liang and X. Wang, *Phys. Lett.* **B629**, 20 (2005).
- [7] R. Hwa et al., *Phys. Rev. C* **66**, 025205 (2002); V. Greco et al., *Phys. Rev. Lett.* **90**, 202302 (2003); R. Fries et al., *Phys. Rev. Lett.* **90**, 202303 (2003); D. Molnar et al., *Phys. Rev. Lett.* **91**, 092301 (2003).
- [8] J. Adams et al., *Nucl. Phys.* **A757**, 102 (2005).
- [9] B. Andersson et al., *Phys. Lett.* **B85**, 417 (1979); J. Szwed, *Phys. Lett.* **B105**, 403 (1981); L. Pondrom, *Phys. Rep.* **122**, 57 (1985); R. Barni et al., *Phys. Lett.* **B296**, 251 (1992); J. Soffer and N. Tornqvist, *Phys. Rev. Lett.* **68**, 907 (1992).
- [10] G. Bunce et al., *Phys. Rev. Lett.* **36**, 1113 (1976); P.T. Cox et al., *Phys. Rev. Lett.* **46**, 877 (1981); R. Rameika et al., *Phys. Rev. D* **33**, 3172 (1986); C. Wilkinson et al., *Phys. Rev. Lett.* **58**, 855 (1987); L.H. Trost et al., *Phys. Rev. D* **40**, 1703 (1989); J. Duryea et al., *Phys. Rev. Lett.* **67**, 1193 (1991).
- [11] I. Ajinenko et al., *Z. Phys. C* **5**, 177 (1980); M. Barth et al., *Nucl. Phys.* **B223**, 296 (1983).
- [12] A.N. Alev et al., *Phys. Lett.* **B485**, 334 (2000).
- [13] P. Abreu et al., *Phys. Lett.* **B406**, 271 (1997).
- [14] K. Ackerstaff et al., *Phys. Lett.* **B412**, 210 (1997); *Z. Phys. C* **74**, 437 (1997).
- [15] R. Stock et al., Proceeding of the Conference on Quark Matter Formation and Heavy Ion Collisions, edited by M. Jacob and H. Satz, World Scientific Singapore, 1982, p.557-582; A.D. Panagiotou, *Phys. Rev. C* **33**, 1999 (1986); A. Ayala et al., *Phys. Rev. C* **65**, 024902 (2002); A. Ya. Berdnikov et al., *Acta Phys. Hung.* **A22**, 139 (2005).
- [16] Q. Xu and Z. Liang, *Phys. Rev. D* **68**, 034023 (2003).
- [17] A. Bravar et al., *Phys. Rev. Lett.* **77**, 2626 (1996).
- [18] J. Adams et al., *Phys. Rev. Lett.* **92**, 171801 (2004).
- [19] S.S. Adler et al., *Phys. Rev. Lett.* **95**, 202001 (2005).
- [20] B.I. Abelev et al., *Phys. Rev. Lett.* **99**, 142003 (2007).
- [21] B.I. Abelev et al., *Phys. Rev. C* **76**, 024915 (2007).
- [22] K. Schilling et al., *Nucl. Phys. B* **15**, 397 (1970); Erratum: *ibid.*, **18**, 332 (1970).
- [23] A. Poskanzer and S. Voloshin, *Phys. Rev. C* **58**, 1671 (1998).
- [24] Y.J. Pei, hep-ph/9703243; Y.J. Pei, *Z.Phys.C* **72**, 39 (1996).
- [25] F. Becattini and U. W. Heinz, *Z. Phys. C* **76**, 269 (1997).
- [26] J. Adams et al., *Phys. Rev. C* **71**, 064902 (2005).
- [27] J. Adams et al., *Phys. Lett.* **B612**, 181 (2005).
- [28] M. Anderson et al., *Nucl. Instrum. Meth. A* **499**, 659 (2003).
- [29] H. Bichsel, *Nucl. Instrum. Meth. A* **562**, 154 (2006).
- [30] J. Adams et al., *Phys. Rev. Lett.* **95**, 122301 (2005), and references therein.
- [31] J. Ma, Ph.D. Thesis, University of California-Los Angeles (2006).
- [32] H. Zhang, Ph.D. Thesis, Yale University (2003).
- [33] Z. Liang and X. Wang, private communication (2007).