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The Signal previews the Foothill League for girls volleyball



By Wendy McNeal

Signal Staff Writer
wmcneal@the-signal.com

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While the Valencia boys volleyball squad have grabbed the headlines with several CIF victories over the past few seasons, the girls side has not been as successful. However, thanks to some real talent in the Foothill League, those days may be coming to an end. The Signal takes a look at the upcoming season in the order the teams finished in 2007:

Valencia

(First, 10-0 lost second round in CIF)
Tomorrow will be a familiar scene for the Valencia volleyball team.

Except this time, it's the girls' turn.

The Vikings will open their preseason match against Dos Pueblos at home.

Just a few months ago the CIF-Southern Section Division II champion boys team defeated Dos Pueblos to reach the finals against Santa Barbara.

The Valencia girls team is looking to have the same success over a tough Chargers team.

And, according to Vikings head coach Ray Sanchez, it's all a part of his game plan to play teams like this in the early part of the season.

"I try to schedule the toughest teams," Sanchez said. "I'd rather spend the preseason losing against good teams and winning against easier teams that way we can find out where we're weak."

Valencia, which went undefeated last season, will be led this year by outside hitters Shelby Laduff and Katie Hank as well as senior setter Christina Worth.

Absent this season, will be setter Taylor Kasha, who is currently playing on scholarship at Bakersfield, as well as outside hitter Layne Castro and middle blocker Deanna Daglas.

Sanchez said this season, the goals for his team go beyond clinching a league title.

After seven consecutive first place finishes in Foothill, and a second round loss to Notre Dame Academy last season, going deeper into playoffs is priority No. 1.

"At some point we're going to lose league and we don't want to measure ourselves against that," Sanchez said. "We haven't won a CIF championship, and we really want to improve our playoff results get over the hump."

Canyon

(Second, 7-3, lost first round in CIF) The Cowboys, who finished second last season, will rebuild with a younger squad.

Head coach Brian Ingino said the team is small will they will rely on their defense and passing.

Canyon, which finished 7-3 in league last season, will be returning junior outside hitter Courtney Longshore as a starter.

The Cowboys lost four key players in libero Jen Riddle, Ashlie Arnold, who is playing setter for the Cougars at College of the Canyons, middle blocker Sara Gibson, who now plays at Pierce College and outside hitter Dani Shirley.

Ingino said the team's goal this season is to "compete and make the playoffs."

The Cowboys, which lost in the first round of playoffs last year to San Marcos, will look for leadership from senior outside hitter Amber Dobbs, setter Elizabeth Renfrow and outside hitter Krista Pruddncio to help lead the team to the top.

Canyon kicks off its season tomorrow against Knight of Palmdale in Palmdale.

West Ranch

(Third, 6-4, lost in CIF first round) The Wildcats of West Ranch look to have another stand-out year.

Last season, the Wildcats were led by Brooklyn Arndt, who led the league in digs while Allison Summers led the league in aces.

This season, however, the team is without Arndt, now playing at COC, and Summers will look take the lead in West Ranch's quest for the crown.

Along with Summers will be sophomore opposite hitter Isabelle Howell and senior setter Sophie Burns.

Wildcats second year head coach Nate Sparks looks to improve last season's 16-6 record. He said the team has their eyes set on the Foothill title.

"We want to win league," he said. "We're practicing hard and cutting back on mistakes."

West Ranch kicks off non-league action against Crescenta Valley Tuesday at home.

Hart

(Fourth, 5-5, did not make CIF playoffs) The Indians are looking to continue their "tradition of excellence" this season.

The team most significant advantage is it is returning four starters from last season's team.

The biggest change at the net will be the loss of four-year varsity starter Jamie Long who is now playing with the Lady Mustangs at The Master's College.

Also absent will be powerhouse hitter Carolin Luppens.

Head coach Mary Keen said that although the team may be weaker offensively this season, they will be one of the best defensive clubs in the Valley.

"We have a lot of really short and scrappy players," she said. "But we want to grow together as a team with the experience we had from last season."

The Indians defensive corps will be led by junior libero Allison Toledo, middle blockers Rachel Richan and Jen Drake. Hart's offense will be led by returning starting setter Casey David.

The Indians preseason action starts tomorrow at home against Valley Christian.

Saugus

(Tied for fifth, 1-9, did not make CIF playoffs) Not making the playoffs last season served as motivation this year for the Centurions team.

The squad, which won only one game in league, was riddled with injuries throughout the 2007 campaign.

Head coach Zach Ambrose, who enters into his fourth year, said that at one point every starter was injured last season and hopes this year to be as injury-free as possible.

Saugus returns three starters, senior outside hitter Katie Estes, setter Allysa Terwall and middle blocker Taylor Schubert.

Ambrose added the standout this season will be freshman outside hitter Jaclyn Clark, whom Ambrose has put a lot of confidence in.

The team will be without 2008 graduates outside hitter Amanda Guthrie, as well as middle blocker Natasha Willroy, who is now playing at Pierce College.

"The kids want to make playoffs. That's their number one goal," Ambrose said. "We're playing very good volleyball right now."

Saugus will visit Alemany Friday to open its non-league schedule.

Golden Valley

(Tied for fifth, 1-9, did not make CIF playoffs) A new year, a new coach for the Golden Valley squad.

The Grizzlies welcome Andrew Vasquez as the leader of the girls team. Vasquez, a former professional volleyball player, looks to make the Grizzlies contender in tough Foothill League competition.

"We're going to be a very good team," Vasquez said.

Vasquez looks to turnaround the teams 1-9 campaign in 2007 and develop the team into players that not only want to compete at the high school level, but aspire to compete at the next level in college.

"I would like to get the program moving in the right direction," he said. "We want to use this program as a resource as development at the collegiate level. These girls have to commit to being premiere level players."

Vasquez said so far the team is working hard and responding well.

In addition, he will rely on returning middle blocker Tessy Sproul and outside hitter Lindsey Murachanian to help guide the team to the top.

Along with Murachanian and Sproul, Brooke Bailey, who is training to be the team's setter, will be, what Vasquez said the turning point for the team.

And of course, like the other teams the Grizzlies will face, they too want to make it to the playoffs.

"We have never made the playoffs," Vasquez said. "The expectation is still there to make it this year."

Golden Valley plays Glendale at home tomorrow.

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