

Fly in the ointment

Hart defeats Foothill favorite West Ranch and causes a three-way tie at the top



Hart High volleyball players Jennie Long (8) and Breena Beckett (3) rise to block the shot of West Ranch's Allison Summers Tuesday at Hart High School. The

1 of 1 [View Larger](#)

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As parents and students roamed the Hart High School gymnasium following Tuesday's girls volleyball match, Hart head coach Mary Krisan and her team tried to keep their emotions in check.

There's still plenty of volleyball left to play, but the Indians proved they belong among West Ranch and Valencia as an elite Foothill League team.

Hart won the first two games and withstood a West Ranch rally to pull out a 3-2 thriller that forced a three-way tie atop the league standings after the first round of games.

The Indians are now tied with West Ranch and Valencia at 4-1 in league play, and they won the match Tuesday by scores of 26-24, 25-22, 16-25, 22-25 and 15-12.

"I knew our talent and teamwork would let us contend," Krisan said. "This turns league upside-down with the three-way tie for first. It makes it more competitive."

Tuesday's match was closely contested to the last game.

Both teams made mistakes early on, but as it had all night, Hart (9-2, 4-1) dominated at the net and built a 9-5 lead.

"We know they're really tough hitters," said Hart middle blocker Breena Beckett, who led

the team with 10 blocks and added 10 kills. "We made sure we prepared to block over the net and to be in the right place."

Beckett had a pair of kills to help the Indians extend their lead, and West Ranch sent a kill attempt into the net to end the game.

Hart asserted its dominance at the net right from the first point, shifting its block toward West Ranch's outside hitters and switching the point of its own attack.

"It was necessary because they set their outsides 99 percent of the time, and we planned for that," Krisan said.

Hart also prolonged several rallies, digging out balls all over the court.

The two teams traded points throughout the first game before West Ranch (16-4, 4-1) touched two straight potential points out of bounds to give Hart the victory.

Wildcats head coach Nate Sparks has noted that his team often struggles out of the gate and gets too comfortable with its talent level.

"I think that was part of it," he said. "Hart came out fired up and played great. When you add it up, it's not a good mix for us."

Unforced errors by West Ranch helped Hart get off to a hot start in the second game. The Wildcats' play up front continued to plague them right up to the last point, when Hart blocked a kill attempt to seal the win.

In the third game, the Wildcats mounted a response.

Behind the all-around play of outside hitter Allison Summers, West Ranch showed more poise than Hart and pulled away for a comfortable victory.

Summers continued to dominate in the fourth game, when she scored the Wildcats' first four points on kills.

Trailing 12-9, Hart outscored West Ranch 6-1 to take a two-point lead, but the Wildcats regrouped and withstood another late rally to tie the match at two games apiece.

Even with Hart gearing its defense to stop Summers, she still managed to play well.

Would West Ranch have forced a fifth game without her?

"We wouldn't have," Sparks said. "We wouldn't be close."

Summers led West Ranch with 28 kills and 25 digs, while Hannah Orlandi had 10 kills and Tani Slauson had 52 assists.

Jennie Long led Hart with 11 kills, and Amber Olson added nine. Anissa Robinson had nine blocks and six kills and Allison Toledo had 41 digs.

Indian setters Paulina Hechavarria had 15 assists, and Casey David had 11.