

Taken to the limit

Valencia barely manages to get past the first round of the postseason



Valencia's Heidi Brown (34) and teammate Katie Hank (18) knock down a hit by Villa Park's Carleigh Mueller in the first round of the CIF-Southern Section Division

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Posted: Nov. 10, 2009 10:19 p.m.

UPDATED Nov. 11, 2009 4:30 a.m.



Valencia girls volleyball head coach Ray Sanchez couldn't help but laugh.

After all, for a No. 1 playoff seed, the first round of the CIF-Southern Section Division I-A girls volleyball postseason shouldn't be a nailbiter.

Tuesday was different.

Pushed for every point, the Foothill League champion Vikings were forced to rally past Villa Park 3-2 at Valencia High School and advanced to the second round of the CIF-SS Division I-A playoffs, where it will face El Toro on Thursday.

"That's the best team I've ever faced in the first round," Sanchez said after the match.

The Vikings won by scores of 25-20, 23-25, 21-25, 25-23, 15-9.

After Valencia narrowly beat the Spartans (21-10) in the first game, Villa Park battled back to win the next two games behind timely quick-hits, carefully placed flicks and by capitalizing on Valencia's miscues.

The Vikings (20-10) jumped out to a 15-9 lead in the fourth game, but their lead quickly dissipated.

Down 17-16, Valencia senior Katie Hank

turned it on, scoring seven of her team's final nine points to close out the game.

Fellow seniors Nicole Delange and Heidi Brown picked up the other two.

"We looked at each other, 'We are not losing this game,'" Hank said. "We gave it everything we had. This was not our last match together."

Hank finished with 26 kills and 10 digs.

In the fifth game, the Vikings and Spartans traded points until the score was 6-6, and Valencia got a huge lift from junior Alexa Schmidt, who recorded two aces during a five-point run.

"If there was a game ball, it goes to her," Sanchez said.

Up 12-8, Hank cashed in two more kills before junior Brianna Earley spiked home the 15th and final point.

Earley finished with seven kills and 14 digs, Brown had 12 kills, Sydney Striff had seven kills, Carly Carapella racked up 46 assists and Brooke Dawson tallied 12 digs.

Villa Park was led by Brittney Paino's 20 kills, while MacKenzie Calle finished with 11 kills, MacKenzie Olsen had 50 assists and Lauren Swart had five blocks.

For Spartans head coach Drew Wetzler, the reason for the loss was very different from Sanchez's reason.

"The officiating, without a doubt," Wetzler said. "I mean, we've never been called for as many lifts as they called on us. All season long we haven't had that many. I've never seen anything like that

in my life.”