

## Valencia gains more steam

First-place Vikings girls volleyball holds back a hot Centurions team



Valencia's Brianna Earley, right, spikes the volleyball as Saugus' Ashley Guthrie (9) tries to block Thursday at Saugus High.

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As Foothill League play began, even Valencia head coach Ray Sanchez had someone else pegged to win the league title.

Thanks to another victory Thursday night, that title is now Valencia's to lose.

Led by a stellar performance at the net, the Vikings moved within one game of clinching a share of the Foothill League title by beating Saugus 3-1 on Thursday at Saugus High.

Valencia (13-9, 7-1) won the first game 25-22, then lost the second game 19-25 before taking the last two by scores of 25-17 and 25-20.

The Vikings have now won nine of their last 11 individual games, dropping West Ranch, Hart and Saugus — three contenders for playoffs spots — in the process.

"I think the loss we took at West Ranch at the beginning of the year was probably the best thing that could have happened to us," Sanchez said. "At the time I didn't think so. It really put it on the coaches to look closer at what we were doing and how we were doing things.

"That really solidified the decision to put Carly (Carapella), at starting setter and I

think we are a much better team now with this lineup than we would have been with the other lineup."

Carapella posted two aces, 11 digs and 43 assists Thursday, setting up senior outside hitter Katie Hank all night.

Hank racked up 31 kills in the match.

"I was shocked," she said when she saw the total.

The two teams struggled for control early in the first game, but a Hank kill sparked a four-point run that ultimately gave the Vikings the advantage.

However, Saugus responded in the second game, punctuated by freshman Ashley Guthrie's misdirected kill for the final point.

"We passed very well and it let us have three options on offense," said Saugus head coach Zach Ambrose. "When we have three options on offense, that's when we can take advantage of some mismatches at the net."

Valencia was in control for most of the third game, but the Centurions simply refused to be put away.

After closing the game out, the two teams battled point for point to start the fourth.

Tied 17-17, Valencia's Heidi Brown brought down a thundering kill which ignited the front line, and the Vikings went on an 8-3 run to finish off the match.

Valencia senior Nicole Delange recorded 10 kills and three blocks, Brown had 10 kills and three

blocks, Brianna Earley posted 10 digs and two aces and Brooke Dawson had eight digs.

For Saugus, Guthrie registered 30 assists and three aces, while Taylor Schubert had 12 kills, Jaclyn Clark had 11 kills and Courtney Ashburn finished with 10 digs.

Now, Valencia prepares to close out the season with Canyon on Tuesday and Golden Valley at home on Thursday.

The two teams are a combined 3-25 on the season.

However, the Vikings are not ready to rest in their pursuit of the outright Foothill League crown.

"We are pretty confident, but we are still have to play our best," Hank said.