

## **Inland Sports Volleyball Preview 2018:**

By: Derryl Trujillo  
Inland Sports Correspondent

With just under sixty days to first serve in the 2018 High School volleyball season let's take a look at some stories to watch along with selected league previews of the upcoming year. Stories are listed in no random order.

First let's look back and celebrate our Elite 8, Final 4, and championship teams from a season ago:

Finalists: Santiago/Corona (D2 Runner-Up), Loma Linda Academy (D6 Champion), Notre Dame/Riverside (D6 Runner-Up), Carnegie/Riverside (D10 Champion)

Semifinalists: Ontario Christian & Aquinas (D6), Sherman Indian (D10)

Quarterfinalists: Orange Vista (D10), Rancho Christian (D9), Paloma Valley (D6), Hemet (D5)

### **2018 Stories to Watch:**

1. Small Schools Releaguings- A couple of changes to note from the Small Schools Area releaguings cycle which take effect this year.

A. Notre Dame/Riverside moves from the Ambassador League to the new Raincross Conference (Ivy League) which combines the Inland Valley and Sunbelt leagues along with Orange Vista. Replacing Notre Dame/Riverside in the Ambassador League will be Desert Christian Academy of Bermuda Dunes.

B. A new league is born- Carnegie/Riverside leaves the Arrowhead League to join an as of yet unnamed new league which also includes former South Valley League teams Rancho Christian, Temecula Prep, and Santa Rosa Academy. San Jacinto Valley Academy moves from the Warrior League to South Valley making both leagues four teams with two available automatic playoff berths.

2. Golden Bears gunning for a third consecutive Southwestern League title- Temecula Valley has won back to back Southwestern League titles and seeks a third straight title. Despite all the league success Golden Bear volleyball still seeks to escape the first weekend of postseason play after back to back second round losses.

3. Can the Sharks be stopped in Big VIII play?

Corona/Santiago has made the Big VIII league their own personal playground and the Sharks are currently on a 66 match winning streak in Big VIII play only dropping four sets in their last twenty matches. Can one of the chasers bridge the gap in 2018?

#### 4. The Great Unknown?

In a new twist CIF-SS officials have reduced Division 1 to a sixteen team bracket effective this year. Five out of the six Southwestern League schools were D1 a season ago. Will Corona/Santiago get the one division bump section runners up usually get? How many Southwestern & Big VIII teams will be in a contracted D1 bracket? These answers will be made clear to everyone on October 12th.

Santiago's Courtney Krueger ,a member of the coaches advisory panel, when asked about her thoughts on a contracted D1 field remarked via text message "I think it's a great move. The rankings & playoffs now take into account that season's performance and address issues regarding placement of some teams based on last season. D2 gets tougher but it's still more manageable than having to compete in D1. Having another shot at a title is very exciting and the girls are already focused on that objective. Now should we get into that top 16 we'll be ready for that too." Krueger further elaborated that CIF-SS officials had been thinking about this move for a while especially since it has been used successfully in Water Polo and Basketball but the committee brought it up.

#### 5. The Calendar:

If you thought last year's start was early wait till you see this year's schedule outlined below-

Regular Season Opener- Tuesday, August 13

Regular Season Finale- Thursday, October 11

Wildcard- Tuesday, October 16

Round 1- Thursday, October 18

Round 2- Saturday, October 20

Quarterfinals- Tuesday, October 23 & Wednesday, October 24

Semifinals- Saturday, October 27

Finals- Thursday, November 1 thru Saturday, November 3 (Three Divisions per day)

#### **Releaguing:**

Here is an in depth look at the new leagues for this upcoming cycle.

No Changes- Big VIII (Centennial/Corona, Corona, Santiago/Corona, King, Norco, Roosevelt), Southwestern (Vista Murrieta, Murrieta Valley, Murrieta Mesa, Chaparral, Temecula Valley, Great Oak), Mountain Pass (Citrus Hill, West Valley/Hemet, Hemet, Tahquitz, Beaumont), Sunkist (Kaiser, Bloomington, Summit, Fontana, Colton, Grand Terrace)

Eisenhower- From Citrus Belt League to San Andreas League

Miller- From Citrus Belt League to Mountain Valley League

Indian Springs- From San Andreas League to Mountain Valley League

Banning- From Mountain Valley League to Desert Valley League

**New Citrus Belt Area Leagues:**

Citrus Belt- Yucaipa, Carter, Redlands, Redlands East Valley, and Citrus Valley

Desert Valley- Banning, Cathedral City, Coachella Valley, Desert Hot Springs, Desert Mirage, Indio, Twentynine Palms, Yucca Valley

Mountain Valley- Indian Springs, Miller, Moreno Valley, Pacific, Rubidoux, San Bernardino, Vista del Lago

San Andreas- Arroyo Valley, Eisenhower, Jurupa Hills, Rialto, Rim of the World, San Geronimo

Ivy League (Raincross Conference Top League)-Notre Dame/Riverside, Paloma Valley, Poly/Riverside, Elsinore, Valley View

Sunbelt League (Raincross Conference Middle League)-Temescal Canyon, Rancho Verde, JW North, Heritage

Inland Valley League (Raincross Conference Lower League)-Arlington, Orange Vista, Perris, Canyon Springs, Lakeside

**Small Schools Area Releaguings:**

Ambassador- Aquinas, Arrowhead Christian, Desert Christian Academy/Bermuda Dunes (From Victory League), Linfield Christian, Loma Linda Academy, Ontario Christian, Western Christian, Woodcrest Christian

Arrowhead- Boys Republic, Cal Lutheran, CSDR, Hamilton/Anza, La Sierra Academy, Sherman Indian, Upland Christian Academy

Majestic- No Changes from previous cycle

Name TBD- Carnegie/Riverside (From Arrowhead League), Santa Rosa Academy, Temecula Prep, Rancho Christian (All from South Valley League)

South Valley- California Military Institute, Calvary Murrieta, Nuview Bridge, San Jacinto Valley Academy (From Warrior League)

Victory- Bloomington Christian, Desert Chapel, Joshua Springs, Mesa Grande Academy, Palm Valley, Public Safety Academy (From Warrior League), Redlands Adventist Academy

Warrior- Noli Indian, River Springs/Hemet, River Springs/Temecula, Riverside County Education Academy, Weaver

### **Ambassador League Preview:**

Loma Linda Academy is the defending league and Division 6 champions. Third year Head Coach Jane Chafeh has a tough task in replacing seniors Demari Webb, Morgan Hall, and Hannah McKee who combined for 75.3% of the Roadrunner kills from a year ago. Desert Christian Academy of Bermuda Dunes moves over from the Victory League (Champions 2004-2011 & 2015-2017) to replace Notre Dame/Riverside who goes to a new Raincross Conference. The Conquerors have historically been a strong volleyball program winning back to back CIF-SS titles in 2010 (Debbie Scott-HC) & 2011 (Dana Graham-HC). Current coach Candess Tarrant graduated two seniors from her roster of a season ago but one of them was standout Aysia Johnson who averaged 3.2 kills per set. Aquinas returns featured outside hitter Eliana "Tia" Chavira who averaged just under 5 kills per set a season ago and was part of the all Ambassador D6 Final Four. Ontario Christian returns a large core of last year's roster including career digs leader Selena Balderas & career kills leader Annaka Jorgenson. Linfield Christian returns their top two attackers from last year in Kelly Rausch and Paige Williams for third year head coach Eric Hawes. The Lions were very competitive with upper half teams a season ago pushing Woodcrest Christian and Notre Dame to five sets before falling. Speaking of the Royals Raimi Albee, last year's kill leader for head coach Teri James, is back for her senior campaign along with sophomore Tristen Walters.

Prediction- The Ambassador champion will not be undefeated. Key to this race will be how Desert Christian Academy adjusts to the higher level of play. At this point one must consider Ontario Christian the prohibitive favorite until proven otherwise. I will say that I have a feeling Linfield Christian plays a significant part in this race whether that be spoiler or qualifier remains to be seen.

### **Big VIII League:**

Santiago/Corona expanded their league winning streak to 66 wins with another undefeated campaign but fell in the D2 title game before winning an opener in the D1 state tournament. Seniors Ashlyn Blotzer (UCR), Aimee Cortes (CSUSM), and Sarah Smevog (SJSU) move onto play at the next level but the expectations are still the same for coach Courtney Krueger and company. Erin Anderson (BYU) and Kayla Pronio lead a hungry group of returners looking to go one step further in 2018. Two of Roosevelt coach Patty Zarate's top three options offensively graduated from last year's squad which finished 4-6 in the league and lost to High Desert power Serrano in a D3 first round match. Norco coach Jake Celestin graduated four seniors from his squad from a season ago including 4.3 kills per set combined from Alexis Vela & Jasmine Urban. His top returning attacking option is McKenna Keef who averaged 2.6 kills per set and hit .157% a year ago. After a second place finish a season ago King returns three of four players who recorded 100 or more kills and played 80 or more sets. Centennial missed out on

postseason due to tiebreakers but loses their leading attacker from last year in McKenzie Pfeiffer to graduation.

Prediction- This is Santiago's league until proven otherwise. The losses of Cortes, Blotzer, and Smevog may bring the Sharks closer to the pack but at this point I don't see anyone passing them.

### **Citrus Belt League:**

Yucaipa ran the table in CBL play only getting pushed to five sets in a second round encounter against Citrus Valley. Three of Amber Von Kaenel's top four attacking options graduated from last year's side which was eliminated in the second round of CIF-SS playoffs. Julianne LeClair averaged 1.3 kills per set and hit .289% to lead the returners. At Citrus Valley Danielle Liley averaged just under five kills per set but the Blackhawks will have to figure out how to replace Kyra Bennett's contribution of 3.3 kps and a .283% attacking percentage. At Redlands East Valley coach Robert Vansant loses seven seniors from a season ago most significantly Emily Sibley's 2.9 kills per set and .200% hitting percentage. Jordan Cherniss and Maddie Zitek both return for the Wildcats. At Cajon Paula Bogie-Thomas will have to find a replacement for Niyanna Gonzalez who averaged 5.2 kills per set and hit an insane .330%. Maya Johnson was the only returner to average more than a kill per set while seeing significant time.

Prediction- I wouldn't be shocked at all if this was a shared league title between Citrus Valley and Redlands East Valley. Yucaipa & Cajon lost a lot to graduation and if both want to make themselves players in 2018 the new faces will have to get up to speed quickly.

### **Ivy League:**

This league, a part of the newly formed Raincross Conference, includes Notre Dame/Riverside, Poly/Riverside, Elsinore, Paloma Valley and Valley View. Every entrant in this newly formed league made the CIF-SS postseason a year ago. Valley View is the defending champion of the Inland Valley League while Elsinore won a Sunbelt League title last year. Notre Dame is the D6 runner up and Paloma Valley reached the round of 8 in that same grouping. James Burnham, in his second year leading the Bears, loses half of his 2017 roster to graduation. At Notre Dame the Titans will also have to replace half of their roster a season ago due to graduation. Chief among those losses are Trinity Wyscarver, who will play at La Sierra University, Nicole Qui, and Jasmin Suarez. Valeria Castaneda leads the returners but keep an eye on Samantha Rincon who had 16 kills in the quarterfinal victory over Paloma Valley. Wildcat coach Stephen Kaas returns arguably the most talent of any squad in the area led by Madison Anderson, Channa Hart, Bailey Mylles, Jade Shelton and Melanie Macklin. At Valley View the Eagles will also have to replace half of their roster from last year's Inland Valley League title team. Jordan Tuiolosega leads the returners averaging 1.3 kills per set a year ago. Elsinore must also reload half of their roster from last year's Sunbelt League title winning entry.

Prediction- This could be one of the tougher area leagues to win. That being said Paloma Valley looks to be the favorite as they are loaded with returners from a season ago.

### **Southwestern League:**

Temecula Valley is the defending back to back league champion and looking to make it a third straight title. Madison Endsley and Jordyn Amoy lead a strong group looking to keep the pennant at Margarita and Rancho Vista Roads. Vista Murrieta loses Lexy Hadrych (UCLA) from last year's team but is loaded with seniors (10) led by Marlee Nunley & Tiffany Pedersen-Henry. At Great Oak setter Aubrea Bandfield graduates but her top two options in Summer Ellis and Delaynie Maple return for coach Mark Motluck. Chaparral lost nine seniors from a side that was 3-7 in league a season ago including their top three offensive options in Kaili Downs, Kenzie Guimont, and Silvia Ianeselli. Among the returners Elizabeth Johnson averaged 1.5 kills per set in 64 sets played. Murrieta Mesa made their second straight postseason despite an 0-10 league mark winning the SBVC tournament but the Rams graduate libero Savannah Esteban. Kali Uhl, an Arizona beach commit, leads a group looking to become players in the league race. Tiffani Thunstrom takes the Rams over after two years under Pat Manning. At Murrieta Valley Ann-Romero Parks posted a 16-12 overall mark but 4-6 against the league and graduates Minnesota signee Rebecca Rendahl. They do hold the distinction however of being the only team who took champion Temecula Valley to five sets.

Prediction- In the Southwestern League anything can and usually does happen. With that being said Temecula Valley is still the favorite here but look for a very competitive race. Don't be at all shocked if the champion, whoever that may be, has two losses. On the other hand it wouldn't be a surprise to see an undefeated champion.

### **Tournaments to Watch:**

\*Queen's Court

Dates: 8/11 & 8/12

Host Site: American Sports Center (Anaheim)

Last year: Vista Murrieta won the Varsity Elite division over Great Oak in an all Southwestern League final.

Elite Varsity Entries: Santiago/Corona, Citrus Valley, Chaparral, Murrieta Mesa, Redlands East Valley, Hemet

Varsity Division Entries: Redlands, San Jacinto, Norco, La Sierra, Ontario Christian, Roosevelt, Cajon, Aquinas, Santa Rosa Academy, King, JW North

\*Dan Quam Memorial Tournament

Date: 8/25

Teams Entered: 20

Sites: 3 Pools at Hemet & 2 at San Jacinto with all bracket play conducted at Hemet

Last Year's Champion (Gold Flight): Chaparral

\*Dave Mohs Tournament

Host: Edison High School

Date: 8/31 & 9/1 (Friday & Saturday)

Temecula Valley is last year's defending Division 1 champion defeating Long Beach Poly in 3 sets.

\*Dive Into the Season Tournament

Date: 9/1

Host: California Lutheran

Teams Entered: 8

The C-Hawks event is usually a good barometer of success for area small school teams.

\*Redlands East Valley

Dates: 10/6 (Saturday)

A great late season tournament test with playoffs starting 10 days afterwards.

### **Some Matches to Watch:**

\*8/30 430pm Santiago/Corona @ Temecula Valley Non-League

-Two of the area's top public school programs square off in what could potentially be a playoff preview with both possibly being in D1 or D2. It's also a battle of league champions as the reigning Big VIII and Southwestern champions get together in Temecula.

\*9/4 6pm Desert Christian Academy/Bermuda Dunes @ Ontario Christian Ambassador League

-A matchup between one of last year's four D6 semi finalists and Ambassador's new kids on the block should be telling with regards to how competitive Conqueror volleyball will be.

\*9/5 430pm Yucaipa @ Paloma Valley

-Paloma Valley definitely steps up their preseason schedule difficulty with this one by taking on the defending Citrus Belt League champions.

\*9/13 430pm Yucaipa @ Redlands East Valley Citrus Belt League

-An early season test for Yucaipa on their path to defend a CBL title.

\*9/20 430pm Paloma Valley @ Notre Dame Ivy League (Raincross Conference)

-A rematch of last year's D6 quarterfinal matchup which was won by the Titans in Menifee.

\*10/5 530pm Temecula Valley @ Vista Murrieta Southwestern League

-The second matchup between last year's top two squads.

