

Broncos return Southwestern League title to Bronco Arena with sweep of Wolfpack:

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Vista Murrieta: 25-25-25=3 (25-6 Overall, 8-1 Southwestern League) #10 D1/D2 Poll
Great Oak: 18-19-18=0 (19-8 Overall, 6-3 Southwestern League) #11 D1/D2 Poll

It was 2012 when last the Vista Murrieta girls volleyball program could call themselves Southwestern League champions under former head coach Kristen Cooke. On Monday morning the Broncos woke up with an opportunity to end that drought with a win against rival Great Oak who pushed them to five sets a little more than one month ago at home. With a one match lead to start the day Vista Murrieta got the job done defeating Great Oak by scores of 25-18, 25-19, 25-18 to bring the title home with just Wednesday's match against Murrieta Valley remaining.

Vista Murrieta took a 10-5 lead right out of the gate in set 1. Jayde Harris had 4 kills in that initial spurt while Ellyn Brown added 3 and Tiffany Pedersen-Henry added 2 more. After a combo block from Brown and Megan Meadows made it 15-9 Broncos the Wolfpack were forced to call timeout. Three straight kills from Pedersen-Henry brought Vista Murrieta to the red zone and Brown's kill at 25-18 ended it in favor of the Broncos.

In set 2 the Broncos were again able to take a lead at the ten point mark going ahead 10-7 off a solo block and kill from Brown along with a kill and ace from Pedersen-Henry. Marlee Nunley also added a kill off a setter dump in that stretch. An ace from Molly Wilson made it 21-13 before the Wolfpack made a rally to close to within a 21-18 deficit. Three kills from Christina Williams plus an ace from Madi Allen were part of that stretch until an attack error from Summer Ellis restored the Bronco lead to four at 22-18. From there Pedersen-Henry recorded an ace, Juliette Russell a solo block, and Harris the set winning kill to end the set at 25-19.

If we learned anything from the last time these two heavyweights got together it was that it isn't over till it's over. On Monday in the rematch Vista Murrieta made sure the outcome was decided early. A kill from Brown and 2 more from Pedersen-Henry along with another solo block from Russell made it 10-4 Broncos. Harris also added an ace in that run. The lead reached 21-13 off an ace from Riley Wilson and a Wolfpack attack error. After Marley Preston's kill at 23-17 Pedersen-Henry and Harris recorded the final two points for Vista Murrieta to finish the sweep 25-18 in set 3.

Broncos head coach Ed Taitano spoke after his team's win about the surprising sweep saying "I'm still kind of taking it all in (winning the title). They played really well tonight. If you had told me we would've taken this one in a sweep I probably wouldn't have believed you. What we're struggling with right now is just trying to stay healthy with that combination of cold/flu season and injuries running their course."

When I asked him about getting to play at home starting the Division 1 playoffs the Vista Murrieta coach remarked "Right now we're 4-0 at home and we've got a solid positive crowd. On any given day we're just not sure who's going to show up so the less travel the better."

Ellyn Brown also stopped by for a moment before leaving the Den. When I asked the senior about just how far this group has come since August she remarked "We've gelled so amazingly and each and every person has a great bond with each other which helps on the court because you trust one another, are there for each other, and can make the best of every situation."

When asked what the sweep proved to her and her teammates Brown remarked "That our team can do anything if we put our hard efforts to it. We really stick together and work together and have the best mindset for every game possible."

Jayde Harris said about bringing the title back home to Bronco Arena "It's so nice...Our motto this year is "Banner Season" because we've got 10 seniors who wanted that banner for our final campaign. Now we turn to making a deep run in CIF-SS playoffs starting next week."

In a lot of leagues across the CIF-SS you will find club teammates squaring off during high school season. With a league title on the line Monday evening I asked Harris about how hard it is to square off against a friend for the championship. Then two hours later set aside what happened on the court like it didn't happen and go back to being friends. She remarked "Actually a lot of Great Oak players are on my club team. So on the court it's like 'Not right now.' They're enemies right now. Afterwards they're my friends and I want to talk to them but right now we've got to focus on what's in front of us."

Unofficially Harris had 16 kills while Pedersen-Henry added 12 and Brown 10 for the Broncos.