



## Bellaire/River Oaks/West U. Sports

Aug. 15, 2007, 7:52PM

VOLLEYBALL

### Bellaire ready to continue title roll

Cardinals picked to maintain their dominance on the court

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The Bellaire volleyball team finds itself in an all-too-familiar position during the 2007 season: Heavy district favorite.

The Cardinals have earned that honor by virtue of their success during coach Ap Clarke's tenure. Bellaire's 30-8 record a year ago marked the sixth time in seven seasons that the Cardinals have reached the 30-win mark. Clarke's teams have claimed seven straight district titles and reeled off 39 consecutive league victories.

With so much momentum, Clarke concedes that Bellaire should defend its District 20-5A crown.

"I would say we're the team to beat," Clarke said, "but Lamar is really talented and they picked up a transfer who should make them even better. We won't them take them or any team in our district lightly."

Lamar is the last team to knock off Bellaire — during the 2003 season, no less. But no one's been close to the Cardinals lately.

Clarke said Bellaire possesses another balanced team and has looked sharp during preseason scrimmages. But the Cardinals have adjusted their scheme to a modified 5-1 due to Alyssa Moniaci's illness.

Moniaci, Bellaire's 5-foot-9 senior, had surgery in mid-June and has only recently returned to action. She is a two-year starter and two-time, all-district selection at setter.

"Aly still isn't back to where she was," Clarke said. "She's played some on the front row, but it's going to take time. If Aly gets back to normal, we'll be an even stronger team."

As a result, Kara Febles, a 5-8 junior, has stepped in at setter and has done a commendable job. Febles was the junior varsity starter last season.

"Kara played a lot of club ball over the last year and it shows," Clarke said. "She's a nice athlete. We have a lot of confidence in her ability to run the team."

As usual, Bellaire has plenty of powerful hitters, led by a pair of all-district performers, seniors Liz Grubb and Ariana Chinn.

#### RESOURCES

#### BELLAIRE FILE

- **On a roll:** During Ap Clarke's first seven years as head coach, Bellaire has claimed seven straight district championships, six 30-win seasons and a current 39-match league winning streak.
- **Player to watch:** Junior Kara Febles is stepping in for Alyssa Moniaci at setter after Moniaci had off-season surgery.
- **Big hitters:** The Cardinals have their usual line-up of big hitters, led by senior outside hitter Liz Grubb, senior right side hitter Ariana Chinn and junior middle blocker Jessica Addicks.
- **Coming up:** Bellaire will open its District 20-5A title defense against Westbury at 4 p.m. Aug. 29 at Butler Sports Complex. The Cardinals also will compete in the Pearland Tournament on Aug. 30-Sept. 1.

Grubb, a 5-8 outside hitter, should fill the shoes vacated by Kalynn Evans, a four-year starter now starring at Southeastern Louisiana University.

"Liz has improved in all facets of the game," Clarke said. "She's putting the ball down a lot better and has learned how to move it around. She can hit it cross-court now."

Chinn, a 5-11 right side hitter, also has made major strides, thanks to plenty of off-season work.

"Ariana recently played club ball for the first time and it's made a huge difference," Clarke said. "She's getting scholarship offers. With her size and skill, she has the opportunity to reach the college level."

Junior Jessica Addicks, a 6-0 middle blocker, is a newcomer to the mix, but she's wasted no time impressing her coach.

"Jessica can definitely put down a nice block," Clarke said. "We're expecting big things from her in the middle."

Senior Caroline Dallara, a 5-8 defensive specialist, and junior Vivian Hu, a 5-5 libero, round out the starting line-up. Both Dallara and Hu have ample varsity experience.

"Caroline is the best server on the team," Clarke said. "Vivian has come a long way. She struggled a little at the beginning of last season, but she picked it up at the end. She's playing with a lot more confidence."

Bellaire has depth off the bench, allowing Clarke to keep her players fresh.

Hannah Jones, a 5-10 junior, should see considerable action at outside hitter.

"Hannah is getting better every day," Clarke said. "She's pretty tall and strong, but she needs to hit the ball with better placement. She's coming along."

Kayla Saenger, a 5-11 junior, and Stephanie Smith, a 5-10 senior, will be in the rotation at middle blocker. Saenger moves up from the junior varsity, while Smith, who attends Challenge, recently joined the team.

Other key players include Joehan Garcia, a 5-6 senior, and Lindsey Febles, a 5-4 senior, at defensive specialist.

Bellaire has a pair of tricky road games, going to Second Baptist at 6:30 p.m. Aug. 21 and St. Agnes at 6:30 p.m. Aug. 24. The Cardinals then open District 20-5A play against Westbury at 4 p.m. Aug. 29 at Butler Sports Complex.

Clarke said she is optimistic about the season. With Bellaire's track record, it's no wonder.

"We're proud of what we've accomplished, but we're still hungry," Clarke said. "Our seniors came up together as freshmen on the JV. They've been on the varsity for a few years. With them leading the way, I know we will be successful."

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