



Memorial/Spring Branch Sports

Lee's Victoria Elizonda, No. 10, tips the ball over the net for a point earlier this season. Elizonda and the Generals play in the Houston ISD Volleyball Tournament Thursday and Saturday.

TONY BULLARD: FOR THE CHRONICLE



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26TH HOUSTON ISD VOLLEYBALL INVITATIONAL

Top HISD teams at the net

Tournament to get under way Thursday at four sites, with title rounds at Butler, Delmar

By JEFF JENKINS
Chronicle Correspondent

A familiar name is atop the bracket at the 26th annual Houston ISD Invitational Volleyball Tournament, which gets under way Thursday at four sites.

Predictably, defending champion Bellaire, which has claimed the tourney title four of the past six years under coach Ap Clarke, is the top seed. The Cardinals are the only team to earn a first-round bye and will face the Austin-Washington winner at 6 p.m. Thursday in Chavez's Gym 1.

Tournament director Marmion Dambrino, manager of athletics for Houston ISD, said Bellaire is a deserving No. 1 seed, based on the Cardinals' success in the tourney and their on-court credentials this season.

"Bellaire's been one of the top volleyball programs in Houston ISD for a while now," Dambrino said. "They're definitely one of the favorites to win (the title) this year."

"We've done really well in the past," Clarke said, noting that Bellaire lost in the semifinals in 2003. "We play tough competition early in the year. By the time we get to the (Houston ISD) tourney, we're usually ready."

Bellaire entered the week with a 16-7 record and have steamrolled the competition in District 20-5A. The Cardinals' closest match was a 29-27, 25-18, 25-17 victory over Lamar two weeks ago.

Clarke said Bellaire struggled in the Pearland Classic and the Dickinson Tournament to start the

RESOURCES

SPIKE TIME

- **What:** 26th annual Houston ISD Invitational Volleyball Tournament
- **When:** Thursday and Saturday

First round

- **at Chavez High:** Bellaire, bye; 4 p.m. Austin vs. Washington; 5 p.m., Sam Houston vs. Jones and Chavez vs. Northbrook
- **at Westside:** 4 p.m., Westfield vs. Milby and Pasadena vs. Westbury; 5 p.m., Westside vs. Worthing and Nimitz vs. Sharpstown
- **at Reagan:** 4 p.m. Lamar vs. Reagan and Smiley vs. Scarborough; 5 p.m. Lutheran North vs. Davis and Waltrip v. Kashmere
- **at Madison:** 4 p.m., Wheatley vs. Yates and Carnegie vs. Sterling; 5 p.m. Furr vs. Lee and Eisenhower vs. Madisc

season. Since then, they have been in peak form.

"I think the Pearland and Dickinson tournaments were eye-opening for us," Clarke said. "We played some ranked teams, and we learned that we weren't as good as we thought we were. It showed us a few things that we needed to work on."

Bellaire has since found its motivation, thrashing Sam Houston 25-9, 25-3, 25-7 and Westside 25-5, 25-5, 25-14 last week. The main difference against the Wolves was serving as the Cardinals delivered 23 aces.

"We really dictated the match with our serve," Clarke said.

Offensively, Bellaire relies on right side hitter Ariana Chinn, who is averaging 10 kill per match. But outside hitter Liz Grubb has been on fire, delivering around eight kills per match the last two weeks.

Jessica Addicks is one of the Cardinals' top blockers, while Kara Febles and Alyssa Moniaci have shared setter duties in Bellaire's 6-2 alignment.

Dambrino said Bellaire will be tough to beat, but she thinks the competition will be stiff.

"We have some pretty good teams in the tournament this year, especially from outside of Houston ISD," Dambrino said.

District 19-5A teams Eisenhower and Nimitz are in the 31-school field. The Eagles open against Madison at 5 p.m. Thursday in Madison's Gym 2. The Cougars face Sharpstown at 5 p.m. in Westside's Gym 2.

Lutheran North is the lone private school in the field. The Lions face Davis at 5 p.m. in Reagan's Gym 1.

Other non-Houston ISD teams competing include Northbrook, Pasadena, Smiley and Westfield.

District 20-5A is well-represented, with several teams outside of Bellaire to be taken very seriously.

Lamar could go deep in the tourney. The Redskins meet Reagan at 4 p.m. in Reagan's Gym 1.

Madison, Westside, Chavez and Carnegie Vanguard also have fine teams. The Marlins have the trickiest first-round match-up against Eisenhower. Meanwhile, the Wolves battle Worthing at 5 p.m. in Westside's Gym 1, the Lobos host Northbrook at 5 p.m. in Chavez's Gym 1 and Carnegie tackles Sterling at 4 p.m. in Madison's Gym 1.

"Lamar has a young team, but they're very talented," Clarke said. "Madison might have the third-best team in our district this year. They beat Westside a few weeks ago. You can't count out teams like Westside, Chavez and Carnegie, either."

District 20-4A powerhouse Waltrip also could surprise. The Rams' opener will come against Kashmere, a favorite from District 19-4A, at 5 p.m. in Reagan's Gym 2.

Other Houston ISD teams include Austin, Furr, Jones, Lee, Milby, Sam Houston, Scarborough, Washington, Westbury, Wheatley and Yates.

All first- and second-round matches will take place at Chavez, Madison, Reagan and Westside. The action will shift to the Delmar and Butler complexes starting with Saturday's quarterfinals and semifinals.

The tourney will conclude with the consolation finals at 3 p.m. at Butler, followed by the third-place match at 4 p.m. at Delmar and the championship match at 5 p.m. at Delmar.


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