

The Pueblo Chieftain

Your print and online news source for Southern Colorado

October 23, 2008

Digging the fruits of success



CHIEFTAIN PHOTO/BRYAN KELSEN -- South High School junior Megan Tapia slams a kill over the outstretched arms of Centennial defender Katie Howe during an Oct. 2 match at the Bulldogs' gym. Tapia leads the Colts into the District 6 tournament this weekend on South's home floor.

South hopes S-CL championship leads to similar success of early 1990s squads.

**By TOM PURFIELD
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN**

Tiffany Shrewsbury was just a sixth-grader when the South High School volleyball team won its first league championship in 1991, igniting the most successful run in the program's history.

Those Colts, led by Shiloh Justice and Chandra Frazier, won three consecutive South-Central League titles, ripped off a 35-game league winning streak and made the school's only state tournament appearance, also in '91.

"I remember coming to the games and they were really good," said Shrewsbury, now South's coach. "But I can't really compare the two."

Shrewsbury was referring to her current team, which won the school's first S-CL title since 1993 and has high hopes to equal or better the other considerable accomplishments of coach Keith Frazier's early-'90s squad.

The Colts (14-5) begin their postseason quest Friday when they host the District 6 tournament at the South and Central gyms. There are eight six-team districts across the state and the top two teams from each advance to regionals the following weekend. Co-league champ Pueblo West, which has won eight of the last nine S-CL titles but surrendered district home court via tiebreaker, travels to Cheyenne Mountain along with Alamosa. East and Pueblo County are in the Colts' district while Canon City heads to Rock Canyon.

South's hopes for a special season really took hold last year, when it reached regionals for the first time since 2002 and just the second since 1993. Returning a talented squad loaded with juniors and seniors, the Colts crafted a "vision board" featuring images of goals they wanted to accomplish this season.

At the top was a league championship patch.

"We've wanted it since we were freshmen and it's just really exciting to win league for once," South senior Sarah Housman said. "We always have fun playing together, which makes it even better when you win."

South is just the second S-CL team other than Pueblo West to host districts since the Cyclones started dominating the league in 2000, the other being Pueblo County in 2003.

For Shrewsbury, this is one step toward becoming a regular challenger to the mighty Cyclones and a team with postseason aspirations every year.

"When someone's such a powerhouse for so many years, it just nice to compete," Shrewsbury said. "We've been working toward this goal for a long time. Every year I just hope to help build our program a little bit more and have higher goals each season."

Shrewsbury's goal entering this season was to gradually improve to the point of peaking right now. Playing in a highly competitive S-CL, she said the Colts have pulled out a number of come-from-behind wins, which has bolstered confidence.

Leading the way is 6-foot junior hitter Megan Tapia, a top-flight talent who has all the skills to go with an uncommon athleticism for someone her size.

While Tapia gives Colts' opponents someone to be wary of at all times, she is surrounded by quality

supporting players.

Housman and fellow senior Kalli Kemling provide extra power at the net with junior setter Ariel Buglewicz controlling the action. Brittney Bailey and Kenya Walker round out the starting lineup and freshman Kayleigh Brown is another front-row player off the bench.

Having dependable players around a force like Tapia is "awesome," Buglewicz said, and it's imperative to have everyone involved for the Colts to be playing their best.

"It's best if we just play together as a team and our passing's really been important for us," Buglewicz said. "If we play together, the big hitters are going to get their chances and it's going to be better for all of us."

These Colts would surely love to match the 1991 team and make the school's second appearance in the state tournament. But that's a long way off and the first step in the journey is to protect their home floor this weekend.

"Districts is really important and hopefully if we can make it to regionals, we can make it to state," Housman said. "We'd just be so excited and thrilled to represent our school and do something that our team hasn't done in a long time."

The Cyclones (15-4) have made three state appearances and, despite a rare year not hosting districts, fully intend to make regionals for a run at a fourth. Led by seniors Rachel Ratzlaff and Dakotah Russ, West is comfortable hitting the road.

"We're going to do what we've done all year. We're not a particularly big-hitting team, but we're pretty deep and can hit from anywhere," first-year West coach Greg Clark said. "We can't control what the other team does, but we look at what they give us and then try to exploit it."

Alamosa (9-5) is the only S-CL team that beat South and West this year, earning the league's No. 3 seed. The Mean Moose are in the Cyclones' pool in District 5 and the two will play at 6 p.m. Friday.

East (8-7) and Pueblo County (7-7) are the S-CL's fourth and fifth seeds, respectively, which landed them in South's district. The Eagles and Colts play at 6 p.m. Friday, opposite the Hornets' pool.

The Eagles don't have a single senior and have gotten stronger this year thanks to exceptional athleticism, defense and tenacity. Junior hitters Jessica Butler and Ellie Carter lead the way with support from Carina Guerrero, Ally Walters and Darci Harrison.

"We try to take good shots and play solid volleyball, nothing too fancy," East coach Caroline

DiDomenico said. "The girls are starting to understand how good basics, defense and a never-say-die attitude can take you places."

The Hornets began the season with high expectations, which took a hit after losing a couple games and losing senior Tiffany Wilson to a fractured elbow. With Taylor Mosco and Olivia Elley holding things together, Pueblo County has fought its way back.

"The biggest thing is the past is gone. We changed a couple things, so they're feeling this is new," Hornets coach Karin Dunlap said. "They have that drive back again and we want to come out in that top two and make it into regionals."

4A DISTRICT VOLLEYBALL

Districts including South-Central League teams. Top two teams qualify for regionals.

District 6, South and Central high schools:

Friday-Pool 1 (South), South vs. Mesa Ridge, 3 p.m.; East vs. Mesa Ridge, 4:30 p.m.; South vs. East, 6 p.m. Pool 2 (Central), Lewis-Palmer vs. Pueblo County, 3 p.m.; Woodland Park vs. Pueblo County, 4:30 p.m., Lewis-Palmer vs. Woodland Park, 6 p.m. Saturday (South)-Pool 1 No. 1 vs. Pool 2 No. 2, 9 a.m.; Pool 2 No. 1 vs. Pool 1 No. 2, 10:30 a.m.; Championship, noon.

District 5, Cheyenne Mountain High School:

Friday-Pueblo West vs. Mitchell, 3 p.m.; Alamosa vs. Mitchell, 4:30 p.m.; Pueblo West vs. Alamosa, 6 p.m. Other pool includes Cheyenne Mountain, Falcon and Widefield. Saturday-Pool 1 No. 1 vs. Pool 2 No. 2, 9 a.m.; Pool 2 No. 1 vs. Pool 1 No. 2, 10:30 a.m.; Championship, noon.

District 8, Rock Canyon High School:

(Days and times not verified) Rock Canyon vs. Canon City, Palisade vs. Canon City, Rock Canyon vs. Palisade. Other pool includes Montrose, Battle Mountain and Harrison. Cross-bracket games plus championship to follow.

Tickets: Adults \$6; students K-12 and seniors, \$5. No league or district booster passes allowed, CHSAA passes accepted.

South-Central League

FINAL S-CL Overall

*Pueblo West 12-2 15-4

*South 12-2 14-5

Alamosa 9-5 9-5

East 7-7 8-7

Pueblo County 7-7 7-7

Canon City 6-8 8-8

Centennial 3-11 3-11

Central 0-14 0-14

* 2008 co-South-Central League champions.

Last week's scores

Pueblo West def. Centennial 25-10, 25-10, 25-12; Alamosa def. Canon City 25-17, 25-17, 16-25, 25-21; South def. East 25-14, 18-25, 25-18, 25-20; Pueblo County def. Central 25-11, 25-12, 25-10.

End regular season.