

CCCAA Women's Volleyball 2009 Championship Tournament Preview

With two-time defending state champion El Camino College out of the hunt, the California Community Colleges will have a new women's volleyball state champion for 2009. The big question is which team of the eight squads that have advanced to the CCCAA Final 8 will grab the big prize?

The top four teams from the North and South regions get together in the double-elimination tourney Friday-Sunday, Dec. 4-6 at San Joaquin Delta College in Stockton. This is the 33rd year of state championship volleyball.

The two recently played regional playoff rounds produced two huge developments. In the North, for the first time ever, one conference hosts all four seeds from the region. The Big 8 Conference is feeling pretty good about itself after conference champ Sacramento, No. 2 San Joaquin Delta, No. 3 Santa Rosa and No. 4 Sierra were able to make it a clean Big 8 (or Big 4 in this case) sweep through the North.

In the South region, the big story is what happened in the regional finals as all four top seeds were bounced from the postseason by lower seeds, all in 5-game matches, and all done so on the road. Newly seeded No. 1 Orange Coast, No. 2 Cypress, No. 3 Irvine Valley and No. 4 Bakersfield complete the South contingent and complete the 8-team field for the '09 tourney.

Sacramento City College, the state's No. 1-ranked team, is the only undefeated college left at 30-0. The Panthers enter the tourney as the frontrunner to possibly give the North region its first state champion since the tourney was originated in 1977. Sacramento recorded sweeps over Napa Valley and Diablo Valley in the regionals.

The Panthers beat El Camino in the first round last year, but went on to finish fifth in the double-elimination tournament while El Camino amazingly became the first time to sneak out of the loser's bracket to capture the state crown.

Delta, the tournament host, has been a frequent visitor to the Final 8, but missed out last season. The state 9th-ranked Mustangs (20-7) returned to the dance by sweeping both Shasta and Cabrillo in the regionals. Delta has the most matches against Final 8 opponents, having faced two of the South seeds, a loss to Cypress and a sweep over Bakersfield back in September at the San Diego Mesa Tournament.

Santa Rosa would like to follow up on its school-best, state runner-up finish of last year. The No. 11-ranked Bear Cubs (22-6) swept Feather River, then rallied from one game down to oust 10th-ranked Fresno City in the regional finals in four games. Santa Rosa knows it has to play better deep into matches since four of the team's losses came in 5-gamers against Sacramento and Delta (twice each).

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Sierra became a first-time qualifier for the Final 8 after the 14th-ranked and original North 7 seed Wolverines (21-9) stunned 8th-ranked and North 2 seed Foothill in four games during the regional finals. Sierra played an exhausting schedule that included its ninth 5-game match of the season, a win over Porterville in the first round. Sierra is 9-2 since a three-match losing streak early in Big 8 play, including a 5-game win over Delta.

In the South, Golden West has an incredible 17 state crowns, but No. 6-ranked **Orange Coast** is no slouch with 5 state titles, including back-to-back crowns in 2005-2006. The Pirates (20-2) finished fourth last year and are poised to win a sixth title this year after regional victories over Palomar and 5th-ranked Moorpark. The Orange Empire Conference has perennially been the South's most competitive conference and co-champion Orange Coast is one of three OEC teams to advance to state.

If there is a sleeper team at this tournament, **Cypress** gets the nod as the No. 7-ranked Chargers (21-4) followed their first-ever Orange Empire title (shared with Orange Coast) by sweeping Cerritos and upsetting No. 4-ranked Santa Barbara in the regional finals. Cypress swept eventual South top seed Pasadena City on the opening day of the season and suffered two of its losses to always tough El Camino. The school is making its first appearance since 2005 when it also played at Stockton.

Irvine Valley, the team with the fewest victories of all Final 8 participants, is always dangerous. In the regionals, the 12th-ranked Lasers (16-4) blew out Golden West, then ended El Camino's two-year reign with a 5-game shocker in Torrance. IVC was a state runner-up in 2003 and is making a back-to-back appearances in the state tournament after tying for seventh at Pasadena last year.

The ultimate underdog this tourney is state No. 15-ranked **Bakersfield**, the 8-seed in the regionals. The Renegades (20-5), the only non-Big 8 or non-Orange Empire team at the tourney, are making just their first appearance at the Final 8 since 1993 (placed fourth). Bakersfield stopped No. 2-ranked Pasadena's 22-match winning streak in a 5-game stunner at PCC in the regional finals. In the first round, the Western State Conference South Division champion Renegades went 5 to beat Riverside.

RECORDS OF CCCAA FINAL 8 TEAMS AGAINST EACH OTHER:

Sacramento City, 8-0: 3-0 v. Delta, 3-0 v. Santa Rosa, 2-0 v. Sierra

San Joaquin Delta, 4-5: 2-0 v. Santa Rosa, 1-0 v. Bakersfield, 1-1 v. Sierra, 0-1 v. Cypress, 0-3 v. Sacramento

Santa Rosa, 2-5: 2-0 v. Sierra, 0-2 v. Delta, 0-3 v. Sacramento

Sierra, 1-5: 1-1 v. Delta, 0-2 v. Santa Rosa, 0-2 v. Sacramento

Orange Coast, 3-1: 2-0 v. Irvine Valley, 1-1 v. Cypress

Cypress, 3-2: 1-0 v. Delta, 1-1 v. Orange Coast, 1-1 v. Irvine Valley

Irvine Valley, 1-3: 1-1 v. Cypress, 0-2 v. Orange Coast

Bakersfield, 0-1: 0-1 v. Delta

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