

All photos by Thom Vollenweider unless otherwise designated.



The Set – Saints vs. Canyon Crest (L-R): Geoff Supplee ('11); Matt Ryan ('11) and Spencer Castillo ('12).



Photo by John White

Tasting Wood – Senior Robbie Cantonwine hits the floor to keep the ball in play and secure a sideout for Saints. Saints seniors in background are Matt Asaro, left and Chris Guarin.



The Win! – Saints top Canyon Crest High 3-2 (best of 5). That's #27 Reilly Marin ('11) leading the victory shouts. Visible (L-R) are #16 Brandon Macheck ('11); Spencer Castillo ('12); Grant McNamara ('10); Matt Ryan ('11); Matt Pekin ('10) and far right is Andy Kondon ('10).

But Really – How's Our Wood Taste? Volleyball 2010

By John White, Parent ('11 and '13)



Volleyball Coach
Gregory Hecht

If you spend all of your time on the volleyball court standing up, you're probably not playing for Saints. This year's varsity players get horizontal a lot, diving and digging, finding out how the wood tastes.

At a recent practice in Dougherty Gym, Coach Gregory Hecht was as relentless as ever, launching serve after serve into play from the back line and hammering the varsity team into shape. His voice rings out through the gym over all the ball-pounding:

"C'mon, guys, we can do better!"

"You're too good to be doing that over and over.

Let's go, everybody – five laps."

"Don't make me say it again! You gotta want it more than Scripps Ranch does, or you know what's going to happen."

"That's what I want to see. Way to finish tight!"

"Everybody get water. Hydration. Good job, you guys."

Dig, Set, Spike

Nine players from last season's varsity team graduated in June, so Coach Hecht is rebuilding this year with a crop of aggressive, young players, many of whom participate in club teams as well. Their defensive skills are especially strong, which makes for exciting volleyball.

"I'm grateful for the students' attitude," says Coach Hecht. "It's healthy and positive, and I'm really looking forward to watching the team grow this season. Spencer Castillo, our starting center, and Austin Oriol are sophomores I've brought up to varsity, and the rest of the team is an almost even mix of juniors and seniors."

Last year was Coach Hecht's first season at Saints. He played volleyball at Los Alamitos High School and obtained his coaching certification from UC Santa Barbara, then ran the program at Marian High School from 1993 to

1995. Returning to Santa Barbara, he was campus minister, vice-principal and volleyball coach at Bishop Garcia Diego High School, then returned to San Diego and his current position at Saints in 2008. In large part, his job is to build more interest in the school's volleyball teams, and his tenure had an auspicious start last year when the team made it to CIF finals.

"Dripping Adrenaline"

Volleyball is one of several sports and activities competing for attention during the spring, so there is little opportunity for pre-season tryouts and practices before the time comes to take the court against other teams. Coach Hecht emphasizes both the fire in the belly that he sees in this year's players and the commitment of their parents to the ramp-up of the sport.

"We're in a growth phase on all three teams – varsity, junior varsity and freshman – and that's a big thrill for all of us. I'm particularly proud of the freshman squad and really want to see that part of the program get off the ground, because that's how we can develop the bench-depth we need over time.

"This isn't about batting a ball around a grammar school playground anymore, and the boys realize it. The volleyball program at Saints produces great young men and gets these players to grow as individuals and stay true to the school's mission statement."

Junior Varsity Coach Aaron French has gotten the religion as well. He works at Serra High School as a special education assistant, but claims that his heart is in Saints volleyball. "I didn't go to Saints," he explains, "but I really love volleyball. The program here beats anything I'm seeing in nearby public schools, so I jumped at the chance to coach here.

"We're getting good attendance for home games, and it's not only parents in the stands, but also teachers, siblings and friends. These players are just dripping adrenaline, and when you watch the way they bounce off of one another, catapult themselves across the court, and high-five one another over a good spike, you see the energy

that's pulling fans in here to find out how exciting and fun a Saints volleyball game can be."

Coach French is right. At a recent home game against Scripps Ranch, Principal Ed Hearn was enjoying the game with friends in the Saints Skybox (top row behind the scorekeeping table). "Who knew volleyball is this much fun to watch?" he said. "These games are terrific."

Fans Wanted – Bring Noise

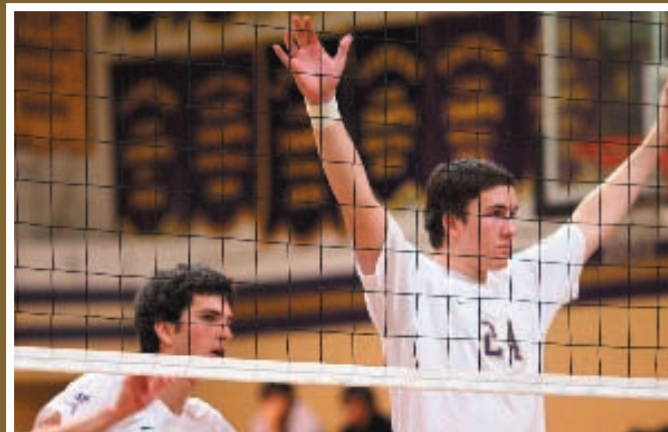
The big change in this year's volleyball program is in the freshman squad, whose new coach is Chris Topping. Chris has personally contacted coaches and athletic directors at a number of high schools to get Saints onto their playing schedules. As a result, he has quadrupled the number of games the freshmen will play – from four to 17 – and signed the team up for tournaments at Steele Canyon and La Jolla.

"This freshman program is in its infancy," notes Coach Topping. "Except for one player, everybody on the team has played one year or less, so it's a new experience for everybody, including me. I played volleyball the whole time I was at Saints, then graduated last year. We're starting from the ground up in a lot of ways, so we constantly practice fundamentals: passing, setting, hitting, rotating. With so many more games on the schedule, everybody is going to have plenty of opportunities to improve."

Coach Topping has another goal: more fans. "I really want the program to attract enough notice among students and parents so that our games aren't so quiet," he continues. "I think we should be able to build a good home crowd. I mean, with only four games last year, we didn't give our fans many chances to cheer, but this year, the freshman volleyball game is on!"

Volleyball fans and future fans: All three coaches have great games in store for you, and they strongly encourage the entire Saints community to watch the Saints calendar and go see a game this year.

Just watch out for the dripping adrenaline. It's infectious.



Block Party – Patricio Healy ('10), left and Matt Ryan ('11).



Spike – Patricio Healy ('10) soars over the net for a perfectly executed point.



The Team – Saints Varsity Volleyball is coached by Gregory Hecht, pictured in the team huddle. Visible (L-R) are Spencer Castillo ('12); Andy Kondon ('10); #5 Matt Rush ('11); #8 Kevin Dixon ('11); Matt Ryan ('11) and #2 Robbie Cantonwine ('10).