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Lamorinda girls beach volleyball begins this spring

By Jon Kingdon

When beach volleyball began, most likely in 1915 in Hawaii, it took a long time for it to become recognized as a competitive team sport. The first professional beach volleyball tournament was the Olympia World Championship of Beach Volleyball, in 1976, at Will Rogers State Beach in Pacific Palisades and it has been an Olympic sport since the 1996 Summer Games.

There are now 90 colleges, at all three Division levels, that have beach volleyball teams, and that number is growing with most of the 54 Division I schools offering scholarship money for their teams.

Later this spring, the Lamorinda schools will be having girls beach volleyball teams that will be starting out as club teams this first year. At this point, the schools looking to have teams are Acalanes, Campolindo, Miramonte, Las Lomas, Northgate and Clayton Valley, though if any of the schools do not have a sufficient number of players, there may be the merging of some of the schools.

"The CIF passed it as an official sport last year when it really caught on in Southern California," said Campolindo Athletic Director Ray Meadows. "We have a number of girls who already play beach volleyball with club teams that expressed interest and a number of parents reached out when they found out that it was a California Interscholastic Federation sport. When we went to the district level, they were in favor of sustaining a program like this that provides more opportunities for the students. It was easy on my end because I just put out an interest survey and we had over 20 girls reply back, letting me know that they wanted to play."

The omnipresent John Vuong jumped at the opportunity to coach the team. "I'd say that about half of the girls on our regular team have expressed an interest in also playing beach volleyball, along with the kids who will be simultaneously playing for their indoor club teams," Vuong said.

The school district has helped with setting up the courts for the schools. "This was a district initiative to add beach volleyball to the schools that wanted it," according to Superintendent John Nickerson. "We've rented the Moraga Commons Park courts and also a facility at Heather Farms for this side of the district."

With only two girls a side competing in a beach volleyball match, the game is essentially the same but very different in terms of technique for the game. "In indoor volleyball you approach with your toe forward but on the sand, you have to put more weight on your heel or you will sink in the sand," Vuong said. "There is more finesse on the sand with less killing the ball and more emphasis on placing the ball. I'm learning on the job and I'm going to depend on the players that are already playing on the tour that will help me." Conditioning is also more important in beach volleyball, according to Vuong. "The players have to be more fit because every time they run, they are putting more pressure into the sand so we will be doing a lot of weight training, focusing on the arm, legs, cardio work, and explosive training. On the sand you have to see, react, and explode."

There is already the possibility of beach volleyball courts eventually being put in at Campolindo. "We have a parent committee that's met already, and they've contacted the CIF for the names of companies to get a baseline dollar amount because there's a lot that goes into the financials to be able to do it," Meadows said. "We also want to get the district behind getting it in place and helping to maintain it once it gets completed."

The possibility of beach volleyball courts being added to the Acalanes campus is also under discussion. For coach Haley Walsh, the issue was not a shortage of players, it was a shortage of coaches. "We have about 20 girls on our team and I am also going to be coaching the 20 girls on the Los Lomas team," Walsh said. "Though we are practicing together, we're trying to keep each high school separate so that we can start a league. We also have some non-league games for Acalanes against Monte Vista and Redwood High Schools. Acalanes and Los Lomas will be practicing on Mondays and Fridays and playing on Wednesdays with one court for Los Lomas and the other for Acalanes at Heather Farm Park."

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