

The first week of June 2011, the Dallas Convention Center was filled with volleyball players of higher quality and quantity than you could probably find again in any other one place at any one time, until the USAV National Championships visit Salt Lake City, Utah next year. Teams of some of the finest volleyball players from all corners of the US (and some from other countries) converged in warm and muggy Dallas for the volleyball showdown of the year. And the action did not disappoint.

Our Columbia Empire Volleyball Association team, Riverview, played Men's A. Our relatively minor presence at previous National tournaments meant we had a low seed (28th out of 32), and set us up for battles against top seeded teams early in pool play. Our first match, on the first day was against "The Angry Dragons," the team responsible last year for sending CEVA's Downhill to the Silver Bracket (two of our players played with Downhill last season at Nationals), and eliminating a team from Seattle that included another of our players. At a tournament with teams we were mostly unfamiliar with, The Angry Dragons were the closest thing we had to a nemesis in the event- they were the top seed in our pool, and the third seed overall. In an early morning battle, in a new venue, with two guys new to the team, the adjustment period took a little too long, and we were off to a 0-1 start in Dallas.

We would rebound from that first defeat quite well, rattling off six consecutive match wins, which included a thrilling match that was believed to be for first place in our pool, against the eventual overall fourth place finishers "Hellbenderz." While it turned out the match was *not* for first place and an automatic bid into the Gold Bracket, we would play our way into the Gold Bracket, guaranteeing ourselves a top ten finish. Once in the Gold Bracket, we won our first match dominantly, before falling to team 805 (last year's champions and this year's 2nd place team), and Team Core. We ended up in 9th place, which we all felt good about, considering we came in ranked 28th, and had seven guys, only five of which played the regular season together.

In all, it was an awesome experience. Many of the teams come from areas of the US where high schools and colleges offer playing opportunities for guys. The team that won the A division was a college alumni team and all of teams there were talented and trained. From a men's team perspective, it felt a little like Riverview, and Puget Sound representative Island Style were from the forgotten volleyball region, the Pacific Northwest. After pool play, our two teams had combined for a 10-1 record, and we both managed top ten finishes- hopefully serving notice that the Northwest region is as able as any.

I am sure my teammates would agree, we all look forward to Nationals next year in Utah, and the chance to turn a few more heads.

By: Erik Jutila
Riverview Team Representative

