

Sports

QUESTIONS? Contact Editor in Chief Tom Bodus at tbodus@ivpressonline.com or (760) 337-3427.

Tigers open regional play with dominant win

BY TOM RONCO
Special to This Newspaper

IMPERIAL — The Imperial High girls' basketball team opened CIF Division IV Southern California regional basketball playoff tournament routing the Heritage High Patriots 50-21 at the Tiger Gym Tuesday night.

After losing the CIF-SDS Division II title game 29-23 to Fallbrook last week, veteran Imperial coach Rich Ponchione was not sure how his Tigers would play.

"It's interesting, we had heartbreak on Friday, gave the girls Saturday and Sunday off, and practice on Monday wasn't good," Ponchione said. "I thought we all might just be tired ... but we gave them a pep talk about a new season and that we could make history ... and we weren't sure, but they showed up."

The "history" part Ponchione referred to was that this game would be the Tigers' second appearance in the So Cal regionals, the last a 2016 loss to St. Anthony's in Long Beach, and his message resonated with the team.

"We made history for the Imperial basketball program winning a state playoff game," said junior forward Sierra Morris. "It was a nice bounce-back and restored our confidence after the Fallbrook game."

And bounce-back the Tiger girls' did: The sixth-seeded Tigers made the most of home-court advantage, taking an early 13-4 lead on the 11th-seeded Patriots from Riverside County and never looking back.

Imperial's first possession established a pattern that would lead to the Tigers' victory. With Heritage in a full-court press, sophomore guard Georgia Gomez in-bounded the ball to Morris who quickly found point guard Xiomara Cardona



Imperial's Sierra Morris (15) and Nayeli Cardona (2) trap a Heritage High ball-handler in a CIF State regional playoff game played Tuesday night in Imperial. PHOTO CORISSA IBARRA

cutting across the key.

"My job is to play the game as I see it. I've always been the one passing the ball," Xiomara Cardona said. "I guess sometimes I pass too much, but I love to help other people score."

Cardona then quickly passed just over the half-court line to sister and shooting guard Nayeli Cardona who drove toward the right baseline looking to pass or shoot.

"I am the backup guard and help Xiomara out and set up things," Nayeli Cardona said. "I'm looking to get the ball to the post to Sierra or Amy (Riley) and if they double team them I look to shoot or I move the ball back to Xiomara."

Denied a shot or drive, Nayeli Cardona passed back to Xiomara at the top-of-the-key who directed a quick, no-look pass to Morris who was posting up one-on-one low in the key near the basket.



Imperial High's Nayeli Cardona (2) advances the ball up-court Tuesday night in a CIF State regional basketball playoff game in Imperial against Heritage High. PHOTO CORISSA IBARRA

"I'm smaller than most girls so it's harder for me to drive to the basket, so I look for a three, and if the lane is open, I'll drive," Nayeli Cardona said. Morris caught the pass,

and beating a potential double-team, in one motion swung and shot a fade-away shot that rattled into the basket. "That is something we struggled with at the begin-

ning of the season, we had to learn each other but as part of a team," Morris said. "We learned over the season to move to ball, and this game our ball movement was good and we were working as a team."

Imperial was up 2-0 but the ball movement and confidence quickly saw them up 7-2, then 13-4 and by halftime they were cruising, 29-10.

All game we moved the ball well, we seemed to find the good shot," Ponchione said. "We made it a point of emphasis in practice and Xiomara had a great game."

Defensively, Imperial was the team with the turnover-producing full-court press.

"We get into the press quickly, and we're pretty successful with it," Morris said. "The key is communication ... reminding each other of the little things, and we felt they hadn't faced a good zone defense and our defense is frustrating."

Morris ended the game with 19 points and nine rebounds while Xiomara Cardona scored eight points, had seven assists and five rebounds. Riley had six points and seven rebounds, and Nayeli Cardona contributed six points, six steals and five assists.

Tonight, Imperial move on to a regional quarterfinal playoff game against third-seeded San Marcos High of Santa Barbara who defeated Taft High of Woodland Hills, 56-53 Tuesday.

The game tips off at 6 p.m. and is available on a pay-per-view basis from nfhs.com.

Ticket prices are \$9 for general admission and \$5 for children, high school students (with ASB card), and seniors (65 and older) and are only available online through CIF's ticketing partner, GoFan (gofan.com).

Canelo Álvarez picks Bivol, Golovkin for next 2 fights

SAN DIEGO (AP) — Canelo Álvarez has chosen the next series of challenges for himself atop the boxing world.

And as usual for the Mexican pound-for-pound superstar, he's charting a path with his legacy in mind.

The undisputed super middleweight world champion will move up to light heavyweight for the second time on May 7 to take on WBA champion Dmitry Bivol (19-0, 11 KOs) in Las Vegas.

If Álvarez (57-1-2, 39 KOs) wins, and if Genady Golovkin beats Ryota Murata in Japan in April, Álvarez and Golovkin will complete their highly entertaining trilogy in the late summer or early fall.

"For me, it's to continue to make history, right?" Álvarez said Wednesday as he opened promotion of his showdown with Bivol, slated for T-Mobile Arena. "I like the idea to go to 175 and fight (Bivol), the second-best fighter in that division, the champion. That's a good challenge for me."

Álvarez also intends to take a third fight in December, likely against either a cruiserweight champion or a super middleweight mandatory challenger. It all adds up to another busy year for boxing's most bankable star, one whose work ethic hasn't flagged with his increasing fame and fortune.

"I like to be busy," said Álvarez, who fought four times in 11 months while claiming all four 168-pound belts last year. "I feel I'm in my prime. I feel more confident in everything, more strong, so I don't know if it's



Canelo Alvarez (second from left) of Mexico, poses with Dmitry Bivol (right) of Russia, on Wednesday in San Diego as promoter Eddie Hearn (second from right) and Alvarez's trainer, Eddy Reynoso (left) look on. AP PHOTO/GREGORY BULL

because I'm more active or not, but I like to be in the ring."

He will have significant height and size disadvantages against Bivol, but that's all part of the challenge to Alvarez, who stopped Sergey Kovalev in his only previous light heavyweight bout in 2019. After blasting through every 168-pound belt-holder last year, he decided not to take another fight at super middleweight against the likes of two-time champion David Benavidez or middleweight star Jermall Charlo, who would both love the payday guaranteed by sharing a ring with Álvarez.

"I know I'm the best fighter, but I fought the best fighters in the division, and I beat everybody at 168," Álvarez said. "You still say, 'No, but you need to fight ...' Why? I don't understand that. But right now, I can

do whatever I want, and I just do the best things and I fight with the best, with the champions. ... (Bivol) has something to offer me. He's a world champion at 175. He's a better fighter than (Charlo or Benavidez)."

Álvarez will go back down to 168 pounds to fight Golovkin, who battled him to a draw in their first bout before Álvarez got a narrow decision in the second matchup. Álvarez had been notably reluctant to accept a third fight with the Kazakh middleweight star, claiming a personal grudge against him, but streaming service DAZN has been eager for Álvarez to take the most marketable bout possible for both fighters.

Álvarez began promotion of his showdown with Bivol in San Diego, where he lives and trains and plays 18 holes of golf almost every day of the year. He rolled

up to the tent outside the harborside hotel in a black-and-blue Bugatti Chiron, and he briefly delayed his first interview session to answer texts from his wife.

Don't let Álvarez's comfortable American life fool anyone, though. He remains an inveterate gym rat who stays sharp constantly with trainer Eddy Reynoso, and he is returning to training camp just four months after he beat Caleb Plant last November to complete his busy 2021.

"He's set the bar," said Eddie Hearn, one of Álvarez's promoters. "Normally the excuse for big stars is, 'They only fight twice a year.' Well, he's just fought four times. I do think other stars ought to be more active, and he's setting the example."

Bivol has his own concerns as a Russian athlete put in a painful position by the invasion of Ukraine.

Stanford mourns death of goalkeeper Katie Meyer



In a photo provided by Stanford Athletics, Stanford goalkeeper Katie Meyer shakes hands with teammates before a game against Cal State Northridge in 2021 in Stanford, Calif. LYNSAY RADNEDGE/STANFORD ATHLETICS VIA AP

STANFORD, Calif. (AP) — Stanford goalkeeper Katie Meyer, who memorably led the Cardinal to victory in the 2019 NCAA College Cup championship game, had died. She was 22.

The cause of death was not released. Stanford first announced the death of a student at one of its residence halls on Monday. On Tuesday, the university confirmed it was Meyer, a senior international relations major.

Meyer stopped two penalty shots to lead Stanford to a 5-4 shootout victory over North Carolina after a scoreless draw in the 2019 championship game.

The native Californian got attention for her an-

imated celebration after the second save of the shootout before teammate Kiara Pickett drilled her attempt to hand Stanford the trophy.

"Katie was extraordinarily committed to everything and everyone in her world. Her friends describe her as a larger-than-life team player in all her pursuits, from choosing an academic discipline she said 'changed my perspective on the world and the very important challenges that we need to work together to overcome' to the passion she brought to the Cardinal women's soccer program and to women's sports in general," Stanford said in a statement.