

No losers at Serve for the Cure prep volleyball event

There are no losers at the Serve for the Cure.

But there are plenty of winners, says Suzie Pignetti, who helped launch the annual high school volleyball event 17 years ago.

Over that time, thousands of high school volleyball players, their families and friends have raised more than \$500,000 for breast cancer treatment and research. And everyone has learned a little along the way, says Pignetti, who coached at Charlotte Country Day, Butler and Charlotte Latin for nearly a quarter-century.

The 18th annual Serve for the Cure took place Saturday at the Sports Connection in southwest Charlotte, bringing together 26 of the area's top varsity and junior varsity teams.

"It brings together two things important in my life -- volleyball and breast cancer," says Pignetti, a breast cancer survivor for more than 20 years. "It's a great opportunity to compete against some top competition, and there's an educational component to this event."

Each team in the Serve for the Cure plays against four other schools. Matches last for 30 minutes, and a cumulative score is kept. But results do not count on schools' records.

"The coaches like it because they can try different combinations of players," Pignetti says. "The players like it because they get to compete against teams they might not see during the regular season."

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools policy does not allow CMS schools to compete in athletics against private schools that are not members of the N.C. High School Athletic Association. But the Serve for the Cure allows Charlotte Christian, for example, to play against Indian Trail Porter Ridge. Or Charlotte Country Day can face Ardrey Kell.

“We enjoy playing here against schools that we usually don’t get to see,” says Charlotte Christian’s Jordan Montgomery.

“There’s no stress here,” adds teammate Lauren Chan. “We just play to enjoy.”

In weeks leading up to the event, players sell raffle tickets for three big prizes in a drawing. This year, the teams raised a combined \$35,000. Additional money is raised from corporate sponsorships and from raffles on the day of the event.

Pignetti says she expects to have a 2019 total within a week.

And the teams gather under one roof. The Sports Connection’s Alan Haseley has made his large southwest Charlotte facility available for the tournament since the start in 2002.

The Serve for the Cure’s educational component is important, organizers say.

The Susan G. Komen Foundation has a booth at the event, in which girls spin a wheel and have to answer a question about breast cancer. A correct answer gets them a ticket for a prize drawing.

“Sometimes they don’t get the answer right, but that’s OK,” says Gloria Johnson, of the Komen Foundation. “We’re here to help them learn.”

Pignetti says breast cancer awareness has changed a lot since she was diagnosed in the mid 1990s.

“We know so much more about it now,” she says. “We know certain risk factors, and we know what to watch for. Part of what we do at the Serve for the Cure is to educate the girls and their families. Early Saturday afternoon, the girls took a break and gathered to hear talks by a doctor and a representative of the Komen Foundation.

“I’ve had family members who were affected,” says Lily Gold, a Kings Mountain player. “This event is really for a good cause.”

Charlotte Christian’s Morgan Shrader says the Serve for the Cure shows how cancer awareness has changed.

“This used to be a scary topic,” she says. “But now we’re a lot more aware of what to watch for, and how it’s treated.”

“We’re rallying around one cause,” teammate Emma Coles adds.

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