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'Sea of pink'

Dig for the Cure raises almost $3,000 for breast cancer research

By [Mike Cane](#), Herald Writer

Suzanne Schmid/The Herald (click to enlarge)

Cascade's Kristin Villanueva, wearing a commerative pink shirt, sets a pink and white volleyball in Thursday's Dig for the Cure match against Everett at Cascade High School.

EVERETT -- After loads of buildup, the match was about to begin. Wendy Close thought she finally had her emotions in check.
But the roses changed everything. Minutes before a high school volleyball match between Cascade and Everett began Thursday night, all the Cascade players lined up and, one by one, gave Close a pink rose and a hug. It was a final pre-game gesture of the Bruins' love for Close, a breast cancer survivor in her second season as Cascade's head coach.

"That put me over the edge," said Close, the inspiration for the match's Dig for the Cure theme.

Playing before an unusually large crowd, Everett went on to sweep Cascade 3-0 in the Western Conference North Division match at Reg Scodeller gym. Erin Vance (seven kills), Danielle Bayne (seven kills), Lana Fingarson (six blocks, four aces, six kills) and Jacqui Bayne (29 assists) led Everett, which won by game scores of 25-21, 25-18 and 25-21.

But any stranger who entered the gym and noticed the "sea of pink," as Close dubbed it, realized that the night was about much more than winning and losing on the court. Players for both teams wore commemorative pink jerseys and used pink-and-white volleyballs in recognition of the collective fight against breast cancer.

Sparked by the leadership of Cascade senior co-captain Kristin Villanueva and aided by help from many others, the match had a much bigger message.

Thanks to the sale of nearly 300 pink "Dig for the Cure" T-shirts and donations, the event

raised about $3,000, Close said. The money will go to the Susan G. Komen for the Cure network, which supports breast cancer research.

A crowd estimated at nearly 400, most of them wearing a pink-hued shirt, filled an entire side of bleachers. The attendance was about three times more than an average Cascade volleyball match, Cascade athletic secretary Elaine Garcia said.

"I'm really surprised at the turnout. I didn't think it was gonna be this big," Villanueva said, adding that she hopes younger Cascade players will make the event an annual tradition.

Cascade's top players in the match were Olivia Condotta (five kills), Jamie Armintrout (four aces) and Brianna Byers (three blocks). The Bruins' record dropped to 1-2 in division and 1-7 overall as Everett (1-2, 4-4) prevailed in the cross-town clash.

Everett coach Heather Burglund, who was coached by Close in middle school and on Cascade's junior varsity team, helped organize the Dig for the Cure event. She was proud that her Seagulls played well and was equally excited about the success of the event. The pink T-shirts, which sold for $10 each, were sold out before the match even started.

"It's great to be a part of something bigger than just volleyball," Burglund said.

Coming off a surprising five-game victory over Snohomish Tuesday, Cascade had hoped to continue its recent run of success. The Bruins took command in the first game versus Everett, building an 11-4 lead. But Everett recovered and outplayed the Bruins the rest of the night.

"Tonight I feel like our offense came together, and we've been waiting for that. We've had the defense (this season) but we finally got the offense," said Burglund.

The emotion surrounding the match might have overwhelmed Cascade players, Close said: "We maybe lost focus a little bit. I was afraid of that. … We were flat."

But that didn't detract from how impressed Close was with the packed gym, which included at least six of her former players and many parents of her former players.

It was a fitting dual-tribute to Close and a worthy cause.

Contact Herald Writer Mike Cane at mcane@heraldnet.com. For more high school sports news, check out the prep sports blog Double Team at www.heraldnet.com/doubleteam.