

Northeast Conference

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For Immediate Release
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Northeast Conference Women's Volleyball Championship Slated For Saturday *NEC Regular Season Champion Sacred Heart Aims For First Tournament Crown*

Somerset, NJ — The 2010 Northeast Conference (NEC) Women's Volleyball Tournament starts on Saturday, Nov. 20 at the William H. Pitt Health and Recreation Center on the campus of regular season champion Sacred Heart in Fairfield, CT. Play commences on Saturday at 4:00 p.m. when #1 Sacred Heart faces off with #4 Central Connecticut State in the first-of-two semifinal matches. The following matchup features #2 Robert Morris and #3 Long Island at 6:30 p.m. The championship match is slated for Sunday, Nov. 21 at 3:00 p.m. The winner of the NEC Tournament receives the league's automatic berth to the NCAA Tournament with first-round action beginning in early December on campus sites to be determined.

2010 NEC Women's Volleyball Championships

Hosted by Sacred Heart University
Fairfield, CT

Semifinals

Saturday, November 20

#1 Sacred Heart (27-6, 14-2 NEC) vs. #4 Central Conn. St. (11-17, 8-8 NEC), 4:00 pm
#2 Robert Morris (16-17, 13-3 NEC) vs. #3 Long Island (10-20, 9-7 NEC), 6:30 pm

Championship

Sunday, November 21, 3:00 pm

For the past three years **Sacred Heart (27-6, 14-2 NEC)** has chipped away at the NEC powers that be, inching closer to a conference title with each attempt. In 2007, coach Rob Machan's Pioneers reached the tournament quarterfinals, and in 2008 the squad climbed a step higher, making its semifinal debut. Returning with a vengeance in 2009, the Red and White advanced to the championship match, ultimately falling to Long Island. However, if history is any indication, the dominant 2010 squad looks poised to capture the first NEC tournament title in program history. The top-seeded, host institution won its first regular season championship behind a unprecedented 20-match win streak, 12-match league win streak and perfect 14-0 home-court slate. Out of the team's 14 total conference victories, 10 were in straight-set fashion. Sacred Heart's precision offense, which tops the NEC in hitting percentage (.246), kills (1722), kills per game (14.47), assists (1611) and assists per game (13.54), is led by 2009 NEC Setter of the Year **Courtney Kidd-Kadulbek (Santa Barbara, CA/Santa Barbara)**. A prolific playmaker, the senior leads the league in assists (1353) and assists per set (11.87). Her 11.87 standard puts her seventh in the nation. Kidd-Kadulbek is flanked by six-time Molten/NEC Rookie of the Week **Dianis Mercado (Vega Baja, Puerto Rico/Calegio Marista)** and sophomores **Elise Sage (Greenwood Village, CO/Cherry Creek)** and **Johanna Ovsenek (London, Ontario/Saunders Secondary)**. The trio made good on the setter's passing efforts by leading their team in kills per game. Mercado fired 3.51, Sage added 3.14 and Ovsenek smashed 2.62. The figures posted by Mercado and Sage were good enough for third and sixth in the league, respectively. In addition, Sage (.372) and Ovsenek (.323) are ranked first and fourth in the league for attack percentage. Sage, an outside hitter with serious accuracy, is one of two players in the conference to appear in the top-10 for kills per game and hitting percentage. Not to be forgotten, defensive-standout **Jessica Colberg (Long Beach, CA/Long Beach Polytechnic)** ranks sixth in the NEC with 4.03 digs per game. The libero's numbers combined with Ovsenek's team-leading 77 total blocks, made it possible for Sacred Heart to hold opponents to the lowest attack percentage in the league (.160). In addition to a deep talent pool, the Pioneers can also draw confidence from an encouraging record against fellow title contenders. The squad disappointed Central both times in its last two playoff meetings and again on both occasions this season. In addition, the Pioneers swept Long Island in straight sets during both 2010 contests. Only Robert Morris

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Bryant University • Central Connecticut State University • Fairleigh Dickinson University
Long Island University • Monmouth University • Mount St. Mary's University • Quinnipiac University
Robert Morris University • Sacred Heart University • St. Francis (NY) College
St. Francis (PA) University • Wagner College

proved to be difficult as the squad split with the Colonials, losing the final showdown in a five-set heartbreaker. Despite a few hiccups, the Sacred Heart squad will put up the ultimate fight to taste its first NEC tournament gold.

First-year head coach Dale Starr and his **Robert Morris (16-17, 13-3)** Colonials finished the season just a match shy of a regular season glory. The squad charged through its first four league matches unscathed before falling victim to back-to-back losses at the hands of Sacred Heart and Quinnipiac. All the wiser, the Colonials were able to avenge both losses in the second last weekend of play as part of their eight-match conference rally. Using their most effective weapon, the masterful blockers frustrated Sacred Heart's league-leading offense by a block margin of 16-2. The team, likely to rely on the same formula to capture the program's first NEC crown since owning five-straight between 1999-2003, leads the circuit in blocks per game (2.66) and ranks 21st in Division I. They trail only the Pioneers in hitting percentage (.206). The Colonials' success at net is largely thanks to junior **Hannah Veith (Columbus, OH/Worthington)** and senior captain **Amanda Graham (Melbourne, FL, Eau Gallie)**. In the NEC, Veith ranks first in blocks per game (1.21) and second in hitting percentage (.350), while Graham sits second in blocks per game (1.17) and third in hitting percentage (.330). Rookie setter **Alex Dienes (Centennial, CO/Littleton)** also figures into the Colonial offense, posting 5.29 assists per game. Experienced libero senior **Corinne Moser (Meyersdale, PA/Meyersdale)** will provide support in the back court as she averaged 3.36 digs per game for the season. The team, which squares off against Long Island in the semifinal round, has been overcome by the Blackbirds in postseason play five out of the last six years. However, the matchup turned more favorable than foreboding in 2010 as the Colonials defeated Long Island in straight sets on both occasions.

No team is more practiced in championship situations than the six-time NEC tournament champions from **Long Island (10-20, 9-7)**. Prior to the 2010 season, the Blackbirds amassed a stunning 54-2 record against league opponents over seven years and a perfect 16-0 slate in 2009. Despite losing three major players to graduation, this season has hardly been a fall from grace for the third-seeded squad led by head coach Kyle Robinson. The Blackbirds stand second in the league for blocks per game (2.04) and assists per game (10.78) and third in kills per game (11.63). They sport a balanced squad with young talent on offense and defense, namely in the form of emerging rookie standout **Hanna Gibeau (Arvada, CO/Ralston Valley)**. She posted nine double-doubles this season and averaged the league's second-best kills per game (3.94) average, cranking out a career-high 24 kills on two separate outings. Teammates **Zuzana Bulchova (Pelhrmov, Czech Republic/Long Beach State Univ.)** and **Breanna Cullity (Colorado Springs School, CO/Colorado Springs)** each pitched in with 2.28 and 2.14 kills per game, respectively. Also, donning a Blackbird jersey is the league's second-ranked setter **Vanessa Gemignani (Colorado Springs, CO/Thomas B. Doherty)**, who made 1,092 assists for a 9.58 per game average. Coming to the rescue on defense will be freshman libero **Artisha Jackson (Euleess, TX/Trinity)**. Jackson's digs per game average (3.63) rank seventh in the conference. Although it's no secret the Colonials have the advantage entering Saturday's semifinal showdown, the Blackbirds' depth and playoff prowess remain a threat to any opponent they face.

During the last weekend of regular season play, the **Central Connecticut State (11-17, 8-8)** Blue Devils showed why this will be their eighth straight NEC tournament appearance. The perennial powerhouse has no problem stepping up under pressure. The team secured playoff destiny in a make-or-break scenario, defeating Long Island in five sets and Quinnipiac in four. The Blue Devils excelled on defense this season, ranking second in the league in digs per game (15.81) and third in blocks per game (1.88). Prepared to spoil opponents' attack efforts is 2009 NEC Libero of the Year **Kaitlin Petrella (Bunnell, CT/Bunell)**. The senior, whose defensive instincts put her second in the league for digs per game (4.78), will be a key player in Central's hunt for its first title. Teammate and setter **Amanda Bayer (Allen, TX/Allen)** follows in second on the squad for digs and holds down the third position in the league for assists per game (9.27). Packing the offensive firepower is junior **Sara DeLacey (Spring Lake Park, MN/Spring Lake Park)** and 2009 NEC Rookie of the Year **Emily Cochran (Adel, IA /Adel-DeSoto-Minburn)**. DeLacey sports a .311 hitting clip for sixth best in the conference while Cochran's 2.87 kills per game place her seventh. Despite losing to Sacred Heart twice this season, the Blue Devils improved the second time around, putting up a five-set fight and confirming Saturday's semifinal could be anyone's match.

2010 Head-to-Head Matchups

Sacred Heart (5-1) • Robert Morris (5-1) • Long Island (1-5) • Central Conn. St. (1-5)

Robert Morris 3, Long Island 2 • Brooklyn, NY • September 25
Sacred Heart 3, Long Island 0 • Brooklyn, NY • October 3
Robert Morris 3, Central Conn. St. 1 • Moon Township, PA • October 3
Sacred Heart 3, Robert Morris 1 • Fairfield, CT • October 10
Long Island 3, Central Conn. St. 0 • Brooklyn, NY • October 16
Sacred Heart 3, Central Conn. State 1 • Fairfield, CT • October 17
Robert Morris 3, Long Island 0 • Moon Township, PA • October 23
Robert Morris 3, Central Connecticut State 2 • New Britain, CT • October 30
Robert Morris 3, Sacred Heart 2 • Moon Township, PA • November 6
Sacred Heart 3, Central Conn. St 2 • New Britain, CT • November 10
Central Conn. St. 3, Long Island 2 • New Britain, CT • November 13
Sacred Heart 3, Long Island 0 • Fairfield, CT • November 14

Notes

- The 2010 NEC Regular Season Champion Pioneers bring the NEC Tournament to Fairfield, CT for the first time since ever. Sacred Heart embarks on its 4th straight postseason appearance in search of their first league crown. The team enjoyed program best 14-2 NEC slate, 27-6 overall record and an unblemished 14-0 home tally.
- In Rob Machan's four-year stint at Sacred Heart, he has led the team to a playoff bid each year beginning in 2007. This season, the Pioneers set a program record for winning 20 straight matches and bettering their season total win record from 22 to 27.
- The NEC Tournament Championship has belonged to either Robert Morris or Long Island for the past 11 years. Robert Morris took home five straight from 1999-2003, while Long Island captured six consecutive titles from 2004-2009. Sacred Heart and Central Connecticut State have yet to garner a league crown.
- After finishing the 2010 season in second place (13-3), Robert Morris has earned a spot in the NEC Tournament every year since its inception except for the 1998 season.
- Both Sacred Heart and Robert Morris have beaten Long Island and Central Connecticut twice this season, while splitting with each other for a 5-1 matchup record. On the reverse side, the Blue Devils and Blackbirds split with each other but suffered double losses to both teams for 1-5 matchup records.
- The same four teams earned playoff bids last season, except none of the four teams kept the same seed number. Last season Long Island led followed by Sacred Heart, Central Connecticut State and Robert Morris. This season Sacred Heart earned the top seed followed by Robert Morris, Long Island and Central Connecticut State.
- As far as semifinal matchups go, Sacred Heart owns a 2-1 all-time advantage over Central Connecticut State with their most recent victories coming in the past two seasons. Long Island holds a 5-2 advantage over Robert Morris, defeating the Colonials in the title game from 2004-2007.
- While top-seeded Sacred Heart notched the program's highest regular season finish in history, Long Island hasn't been as low as third since 2003. Except for 2008, Robert Morris hasn't been seeded as high as second since 2005. Central Connecticut State's most recent high-seed spike at second in 2007.