

Going For Gold at Big South on Sunday in the USA and American Divisions

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17-USA

I solicited information from PrepVolleyball.com readers on the message forum, and I got an eerily prescient message from "**samdetroit**", who is affiliated with ACE 17 Smack Black. ACE entered the 17-USA tournament as the #14 seed. "samdetroit" had this to say about ACE's chances at Big South: "I do feel like we are one of the teams to beat at USA division there. Would be shocked if we don't get a bid..." And there I was on Sunday afternoon, sitting courtside watching ACE 17 Smack Black playing TAV 17-Blue in the championship match. But more on that later.

Overall #1 seed TAV 17-Blue rolled – as in, without losing a set – all the way to the first semifinal match, where they met Triangle 17-Blue. TAV continued to roll to the finals, as they bested Triangle, 25-15, 25-16, whose hopes for a bid now lay in the consolation match for third place.

ACE 17 Smack Black also rolled to the other semifinal match by not dropping a set. Aside from a 30-28 set against East Carolina Juniors, no other team scored more than 19 points against Ace leading up to the semifinals, where Houston Juniors 17-National played them tough, but came up short, 25-21, 25-17.

That set up a bid match (for third place) between Triangle and Houston Juniors, and Houston earned the bid with a 25-23, 25-23 win.

The championship match between TAV 17-Blue and ACE 17 Smack Black was a fascinating matchup. After ACE's middle **Alyssa Staggs** rammed down a kill on the ten foot line, outside **Kayla Turner** hit a bomb cross court to put ACE up 18-13. TAV did not lie down. Middle **Bailee Larkin-McDowell** terminated the ball on a slide, and then **Katie Martin** made a great dig on a hard hit and setter **Piyusha Boteju** found **Jacqueline Vernor** in quick transition and she put the ball down for a kill. Martin again made another great dig, and this time the set in transition went to another Martin – **Jordan Martin** – and she buried the ball. Boteju went back to serve, and zeroed in on a vulnerable spot in ACE's back row... and served the ball on a laser to that spot again and again. Her ace brought TAV to within one, 19-20, but ACE's **Kirby Anderson** put an end to her serving run with a quick kill from the middle. **An amazing dig by libero Alexandria Silver** allowed TAV's Vernor to come right back with another kill, 20-21. A couple of errors on both sides led to set point for ACE, and outside **Holly Milam's** kill on a shoot set won it for ACE, 25-21. Set two was very similar to the first set. Alyssa Staggs started things off with a right-side missile for ACE, and Boteju and **Briana Dorsey** answered right back with kills for TAV, **thanks to more amazing digs by Silver**. ACE's **Holly Milam** picked up where she left off in the first set, with a quick-strike kill out of the middle, followed up by **Kirby Anderson's** crushing blow right through the TAV block. Anderson combined for two stuff blocks in a row, first with Turner, and next with **Chloe Davis**, and a Turner ace led to a timeout by TAV. Dorsey got the call, and buried one from the right side for TAV, followed by Jordan Martin drilling a shot down the line. Staggs responded for ACE with a kill from the left, then she got up over everyone and smacked another one to the floor. Alexis Wright's sweet kill made it 13-9 ACE, and they started to taste a victory. TAV's **Briana Dorsey** and Boteju kept it close with a couple of not-so-nice kills, but ACE kept up the pressure. Milam's passing and hitting, and kills by Turner and **Alexis Wright** helped ACE to a 17-14 lead, and Brooke Martin was extra tough on defense and TAV's hitters found it difficult to find the floor. At 20-17, Staggs scored on a kill from the right, then went back and served an ace, and two kills by Milam gave match point to ACE, and it ended on a hitting error by TAV, 25-21. With that, ACE 17 Smack Black went home with the 17-USA Big South Championship trophy and a bid to nationals, and TAV's consolation was a bid to nationals as well. And with that, "**samdetroit**" earns a place on the PrepVolleyball All-Star Prognosticator Team