

Great comeback by Marion falls short

Written by Jim Ecker

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The Marion Indians staged one of the greatest comebacks in school history Thursday at the state volleyball tournament, but their terrific effort ended in tearful disappointment.

The Indians roared back from a 2-0 deficit against West Delaware in the semifinals of the Class 4A tournament and forced a fifth set, but the two-hour battle of Wamac Conference powers went to the visitors from Manchester.

West Delaware trimmed Marion, 25-22, 25-20, 24-26, 20-25, 15-9, to earn a date with Harlan in the finals Friday afternoon.

The Indians staved off match point in the third set and pushed West Delaware to the limit before retiring with a 34-8 record for the campaign.

"I'm really proud of the girls," said Marion Coach Roxanne Paulsen. "Any time you are down, it's easy to let it go. The girls didn't.

Even in the fifth set when we were down, there were girls that wanted the ball. That's the attitude you want. They embraced the battle."

Marion adjusted some of its defensive schemes after the second set and got back in the match.

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"We were down 0-and-2 and we had nothing to lose, so we could go crazy and do what we had to do. And we did," said senior Amanda Sahm. "We got a little more fire in us and it helped us push forward."

The Indians trailed 23-19 in the third set and were just two points away from losing the match. They scored four straight points to tie the game, 23-23, but West Delaware got the next point and had match point at 24-23.

Isabella Sade came up with a kill to tie the game 24-24, then the Indians blocked a shot at the net and won the third set 26-24 on a block by Olivia Frazier (or as the public address announcer called her OH!-livia Frazier).

The Indians trailed 12-7 in the fourth set, but an 8-2 run gave them a 15-14 edge on an ace serve by Sahm. West Delaware tied at 16-16, but Marion scored four straight points and won the set 25-20 on a winner by Sade again.

That set up the fifth and decisive set.

"We started to believe in ourselves more, I think," said Sade, explaining the comeback. "We did not want to end our season like that at all. And we were going to fight for everything."

The fifth set was tied 4-4, but West Delaware took control and grabbed a 10-6 lead. Marion pulled within 10-8, but the Hawks won five of the next six points for the match.

West Delaware (45-2) has not lost a match to a Class 4A team all season, with both its setbacks coming against Class 5A clubs. The Hawks blanked Marion during the regular season 2-0, but the Indians nearly got even at the state meet.

"It was a lot of fun," said Sahm, who will play volleyball at Gardner-Webb University next year. "That's why we play the sport of volleyball, for games like that."

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"We didn't want the season to be over, so we knew we had to push and give literally every ounce of our bodies."



Marion senior Abby Phillips thought West Delaware may have enjoyed a slight mental edge when the match began.

"They came out really strong and they have a really fast offense," she said. "I don't think we were as mentally ready as them and we were not as focused. As the game went on, we knew we had to dig deep and be more focused throughout the match.

"We did it for each other," she said about the stirring comeback.

The Indians said they enjoyed the state tournament, even though it ended too soon. And they enjoyed the journey to get here.

"All the fun times I had with my team are what I'll remember the most," said Sahm. "I love this team. This is the closest I've ever been with a team."

Sade said she's proud of the team's effort. "We did not hand it to them," she said. "That's what I'll remember."

Sade, a 6-foot-1 sophomore with a bright future, led Marion with 18 kills. Alyssa Thomas was right behind with 17 kills. Morgan Swanger had 12 kills and Frazier finished with eight.

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Sahm collected 32 assists and Caitlin Smith had 24. Phillips, who will play at Iowa State, contributed 29 digs despite playing with a sore right hand. Johanna Stegall had 14 digs, Smith 13 digs and Tanea Westhoff 12 digs.

"I thought a lot of our kids did a lot of good things," said Paulsen. "They (the Hawks) just did a little better."

Bridget Hoffmann and Kristen Wegmann had 15 kills for West Delaware. Carlee Ketchum rolled up 51 assists.