

Young Mustangs fall short to Ashford

Written by Jim Ecker

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Megan Paustian got a taste of college volleyball during her one semester at Kirkwood last year, but even that limited experience has helped her take a leadership role with the young team at Mount Mercy University this season.

The Mustangs used four freshmen, four sophomores and a junior in their nine-player rotation Wednesday night during a 25-27, 25-12, 25-14, 25-18 loss to Ashford University in a non-conference match at the Hennessey Recreation Center.

Paustian, a sophomore, spent one semester at Kirkwood and one semester at Scott Community College before enrolling at Mount Mercy this year.

"I'm not a captain, but I find myself talking a lot in the huddles and talking a lot on the court and just getting the girls pumped up," said Paustian, a 5-foot-11 outside hitter who starred in high school at Pleasant Valley.

Mount Mercy (3-5) got off to a good start Wednesday with a 27-25 victory in the first game, but Ashford (11-3) dominated the match from there.

"We need to play better," said Paustian, who led the Mustangs with 11 kills. "Our passing was off and then our setting was off, and we couldn't execute our hitting either. And our blocking was

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way off tonight, too.

"We need to work on that in practice tomorrow and be ready for this weekend."

Mount Mercy Coach Deb Marlin saw flashes of good volleyball from her club, but said the Mustangs needed to play better defense and get more blocks at the net.

"I think we showed signs of playing well," said Marlin, in her second year as head coach. "We'll learn from it and hopefully we'll grow and try to limit those mistakes."

Samantha Meyer, Hannah Whitley, Demi Heiss and Emily Hendrickson were the four freshmen in the rotation. Paustian, Cori Peterzalek, Leslie Hoffmann and Abbie Perez were the four sophomores on the court, along with junior Emma Pisarik. Senior Kara Oakley also saw playing time.

"We're definitely young, but we like what we have," said Marlin. "We've brought in a great 2014 Class. We need to continue to grow from there.

"We're going to have some bumps in the road, partly because of age. I don't like to play that (youth) card a whole lot, but it's pretty obvious."



Perez collected 20 assists. Peterzalek and Meyer had 16 digs. Heiss had eight kills, Peterzalek seven kills and Hoffmann six kills.

Whitley had 12 digs and Perez had 11.

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"I think we have huge potential," said Paustian. "We're a young team. We need to work together in practices and keep talking and have each other's back all the time."

Marlin thinks Paustian is an important piece of the puzzle.

"I saw her as a senior down at Pleasant Valley," said Marlin. "I really liked her a lot, and unfortunately she ended up at Kirkwood."

"She was excited to come here this year and we were excited to get her. She's doing great for us."