

No. 3 Indians cruise without Phillips

Written by Tom Fruehling

Thursday, 30 October 2014 22:33 - Last Updated Thursday, 30 October 2014 22:48



With her right hand bandaged like a sledgehammer, senior all-stater Abby Phillips is still trying to take her Marion volleyball team to its first state tournament in her stellar four-year career as a starter.

The diminutive libero, an Iowa State recruit who holds the all-time Indian record for digs, hurt her hand diving for a ball at practice Oct. 10 but played six matches before seeing a doctor and realizing the hand was broken.

She's missed seven matches since then and may not be able to return as Marion marches through the post-season

"Even on the bench she's still an invaluable member of the team," said Coach Roxanne Paulsen Thursday night after the Indians whacked Davenport Assumption 3-0 in a regional semifinal on Marion's home court.

"It breaks our heart that she's not on the court. But she continues to be a leader."

Phillips and fellow senior star setter Amanda Sahm have been the nucleus of Marion's squad for four years.

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Up to now, the Indians' season has ended in the regional finals, twice in losses to Dubuque Wahlert and last year to Assumption.

"But this is our year," said Sahm, the acknowledged floor general for Marion (32-7). "We're playing with a little chip on our shoulders. We want to get to state."

The next step is the regional final next Tuesday in Maquoketa against DeWitt Central.

They had no trouble avenging last season's regional loss to Assumption.

Marion went up 5-0 in game one and never let up in coasting to a 25-8 shellacking. The second game was even more one-sided.

Assumption scored the first point, but the Indians reeled off 12 straight points and sailed to a 25-5 rout.

"The kids just came out and did what they had to do," said Paulsen. "They were passing really well and doing a great job at the net."

Marion's solid front line is bolstered by the twin towers of 5-foot-10 juniors Alyssa Thomas and Olivia Frazier.

Thomas is a ferocious hitter who is only the third Marion player to record 1,000 career kills, while Frazier is a blocking specialist. And this year they've been joined upfront by 6-foot-1 sophomore newcomer Isabella Sade.

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"That gives us a lot more strength with the three of them on the court," Paulsen pointed out. "And it lets us move Alyssa from the middle to the outside."

All three were dominant in the first two lopsided opening games. And the veterans came through when it counted in the third game.

It was a see-saw match with a seemingly re-energized Assumption squad coming back from a five-point deficit to tie it up at 17-17.

"I think we came out a little tense," said Frazier.

With Sahm serving, the Indians scored seven straight points. Thomas had two big kills in the rally and Frazier two blocks.

Thomas finished off the 25-19 victory with her 14th kill on the night. She said the team is playing for its two senior inspirational leaders.

"We want Amanda and Abby to get to state," Thomas said. "We're feeding off of their energy."

And from her seat on the bench, Phillips said the team is doing fine without her.

"They're really clicking," she said. "They're playing with a lot of heart."