

Kohawks capture title, earn NCAA bid

Written by Jim Ecker

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The Coe volleyball team won the Iowa Conference tournament Saturday night and half the squad took off for the locker room and their normal post-game meeting.

Not so fast, ladies.

The Kohawks had to be summoned back to the gym at Eby Fieldhouse to collect their tournament awards, pose for pictures and hug everyone in sight.

You'll have to forgive the Kohawks for not knowing how to act after sweeping Buena Vista, because this is the first time Coe has ever won the conference tournament.

"No one was telling us what to do," laughed senior Rachel Schaefer, the all-time kills leader at Coe. "I thought we'd go and talk first and then come up and get our hugs."

The Kohawks (28-8) earned the league's automatic berth in the NCAA Division III regional tournament that begins next week. This will be Coe's second trip to the NCAA tourney in school history.

"It's awesome," said senior Mackenzie Harbaugh, who ranks eighth in the nation in total assists

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and 14th in service aces. "We've worked so hard for this. It finally paid off and it feels good."

Coe dominated the match, 25-20, 25-17, 25-16.

"It feels amazing," said Coach DeAnn Woodin. "The girls have been battling all year and focused on getting better every day and every match. The hard work has paid off."

The Kohawks lost to Wartburg in the Iowa Conference tournament finals last year and used the near-miss as motivation.

"We wanted it so much," said Harbaugh. "We knew what we had to do and we did it."

Schaefer said the agonizing loss to Wartburg set the stage for this team's success.

"That's what fueled me through all postseason and preseason. Every workout I had, every practice I had," she said. "It was my motivation. It pushed me through everything. I felt like, I don't want to feel that again."

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It's hard to believe that the Kohawks have won the title this year. It all worked out in the end, but it was a long journey. The team worked hard, and the coaches did a great job. The players were young, but they were determined. They kept going, and they won. It was a great achievement for everyone involved.