

Sullivan keeps volleyball in perspective

Written by Tom Fruehling

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Even (and especially) in defeat, Cedar Rapids Xavier volleyball coach Barb Sullivan remains calm and collected.

No squirming. No scowling. No screaming.

Games are punctuated by constant cheers of “good job” and “great shot.” Mistakes are applauded for the effort that was made.

Part of the relaxed demeanor is that the successful fourth-year Saints coach is six months pregnant with her first child and less mobile than in her own stellar playing form.

But mostly it’s in her nature as both coach and teacher.

“I tend to always be positive,” Sullivan said Saturday afternoon after her highly ranked team (now 20-9) fell to powerhouse West Delaware in the quarterfinals of the 24-school Westside Invitational at Jefferson.

“I know I don’t respond to negative criticism and didn’t when I was a player. I always take a positive approach. I want them to know I always have their best interests at heart.”

Her relatively small roster of 10 girls came into Saturday’s talent-packed tournament as one of

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the six top seeds in preliminary pool play and ranked seventh in the state in Class 4A.

It was but a mild upset that they lost to the Hawks of West Delaware (25-9), the ninth-ranked squad in Class 4A.

In high school volleyball, class distinctions are misleading. Of the two dozen teams in the all-day tourney, 14 of them are currently ranked and four of them are in the top five of their classes. Three are defending state champions.



The Dike-New Hartford Wolverines, last year's Class 2A champs and the meet's overall top seed, extended their season record to 38-0 by defeating Class 1A third-ranked Tripoli in the finals of the top tier gold bracket on Saturday.

Tripoli, which has won four straight state crowns, was the defending Westside Invitational champion.

Of the six Metro teams in the tournament, Washington lasted the longest by winning four of six matches and claiming the top spot in the third-tier bronze bracket by defeating Dubuque Wahlert in two sets. Linn-Mar also went 4-2.

Along with unranked Kennedy, Xavier won its pool play bracket Saturday to advance into championship bracket competition.

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The Cougars (16-11) lost in the quarterfinal round to runnerup Tripoli.

The Saints, meanwhile, opened play with a rugged three-set win over Waterloo West.

"We knew how good they were, since they'd taken us to three sets just last Tuesday," Sullivan said. "It was a tough first game. They battled us all the way."

Xavier then breezed past Williamsburg and Class 3A seventh-ranked West Liberty.

"That was by far our best match of the day," said the Saints coach, who took her team to the state tournament in her first two years. "We were very aggressive and very consistent the whole game. It's really the best we've played."

But they ran into a buzzsaw against West Delaware.

"They've got a good defense and a really quick offense," said Sullivan, who was previously an assistant at Linn-Mar and Kennedy. "We weren't quite ready for their speed. They threw us off-balance.

"It was kind of a letdown after we'd played so well the game before."

Still, she stayed upbeat.

"Every team in this tournament is good. It's a very competitive field. We finished 3-1, so overall, it was a good day. I'm happy with the way the girls played."

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Sullivan, 32, who was married last New Year's Day to Xavier science teacher and assistant football and girls basketball coach Dave Sullivan, teaches six theology classes at Xavier.

She says she tells her players to keep the game of volleyball in perspective.

"It's God, family and volleyball, in that order," she said. "And these young ladies always know that we love them and care about them a great deal."

WESTSIDE INVITATIONAL

POOL A: Dike-New Hartford 3-0, Iowa City West 2-1, Waterloo Columbus 1-3, Jefferson 0-3.

POOL B: Hempstead 3-0, Dowling 2-1, Marion 1-2, North Cedar 0-3.

POOL C: Tripoli 3-0, Mount Vernon 1-2, Washington 1-2, Roosevelt 1-2.

POOL D: Xavier 3-0, West Liberty 2-1, Waterloo West 1-2, Williamsburg 0-3.

POOL E: West Delaware 3-0, Linn-Mar 2-1, Indianola 1-2, Wahlert 0-3.

POOL F: Kennedy 2-1, Maquoketa 2-1, Urbandale 2-1, Aplington-Parkersburg 0-3.

QUARTERFINALS

Dike-New Hartford def. Maquoketa, 25-19, 25-20

West Delaware def. Xavier, 25-18, 25-15

Dowling def. Hempstead, 25-18, 25-15

Tripoli def. Kennedy, 25-21, 25-19

SEMIFINALS

Dike-New Hartford def. West Delaware, 25-13, 25-23

Tripoli def. Dowling, 25-16, 18-25, 15-9

FINALS

Dike-New Hartford def. Tripoli, 25-13, 25-23

XAVIER RESULTS

Def. West Liberty, 21-18, 21-16

Def. Waterloo West, 21-15, 20-22, 15-13

Def. Williamsburg, 21-15, 21-10

Lost to West Delaware, 25-18, 25-15

KENNEDY RESULTS

Def. Maquoketa, 21-16, 21-19

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Def. Aplington-Parkersburg, 21-17, 21-8

Lost to Urbandale, 15-21, 21-17, 15-13

Lost to Tripoli, 25-21, 25-19

LINN-MAR RESULTS

Lost to West Delaware, 21-14, 21-10

Def. Wahlert, 21-16, 21-12

Def. Indianola, 21-17, 21-19

Def. Waterloo West, 21-16, 21-16

Def. Urbandale, 15-21, 21-16, 16-14

Lost to Waterloo Columbus, 21-8, 18-21, 15-12

WASHINGTON RESULTS

Lost to Tripoli, 21-13, 22-20

Def. Mount Vernon, 27-29, 21-17, 15-9

Lost to Roosevelt, 21-18, 21-16

Def. North Cedar, 21-9, 21-17

Def. Marion, 21-13, 22-20

Def. Wahlert, 21-7, 22-20

MARION RESULTS

Lost to Hempstead, 21-15, 21-9

Lost to Dowling, 21-16, 21-10

Def. North Cedar, 21-11, 21-17

Lost to Washington, 21-13, 22-20

JEFFERSON RESULTS

Lost to Dike-New Hartford, 21-9, 21-12

Lost to Iowa City West, 21-13, 21-9

Lost to Waterloo Columbus, 21-14, 21-11

Lost to Indianola, 21-18, 18-21, 15-11