

Surprising Warriors reach MVC finals

Written by Tom Fruehling

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Among the dozens of state tournament banners hanging in the Cedar Rapids Washington gymnasium there is but one lonely one for volleyball.

Before most any of the girls on this year's team were even born, the Warriors made it to the state meet way back in 1994. That's it in the history of the school.

This may be the year that a second banner is hung.

"That's our goal," according to junior outside power hitter Dani Franklin. "We want to see another one go up in the gym."

The Warriors staked a claim Saturday to be a legitimate state qualifying team by finishing a surprising second in the talent-laden Mississippi Valley Conference tournament at Kennedy.

Of the 14 MVC schools in the field, seven are ranked in the top 15 in the state in either Class 4A or 5A.

Unranked at 20-11 coming in, Washington reeled off a string of impressive victories to advance to the championship final against Class 5A third-ranked Dubuque Hempstead (22-4).

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Along the way were upsets over two ranked teams in host Kennedy and Dubuque Wahlert.

The Warriors finally lost to Hempstead, 25-21, 25-19, in the finals in a hard-fought match. But Coach Kari Lombardi couldn't have been more proud of the effort her senior-heavy squad displayed.

"I'm pretty sure this is the highest Washington has ever finished in the conference tournament," she said. "And to do that with all the ranked teams here is an accomplishment.



"We played really well today. I think it gives us momentum going into the state tournament."

To get there, however, they'll have to get past Linn-Mar, another team that far exceeded expectations in Saturday's tournament.

Entering the day at 13-16, the Lions also pulled off some surprises and made it as far as the quarterfinals in the championship bracket before falling to the Warriors, 25-18, 25-13.

After losing to eighth-ranked Cedar Falls in their first morning match, the Lions got better as the day went along.

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"I think we were still asleep that first game," said Co-Coach Erin Downing. "But after that the girls really picked it up."

They upended Class 5A defending state champ Iowa City West and then knocked off Hempstead, 2-0.

"We really took it to them," Downing said. "We played smart, aggressive volleyball. It was easily our best game all year."

As both Washington and Linn-Mar seem to be peaking at just the right time in the season, they'll have a return match Tuesday to end the regular season.

Through a quirk in postseason scheduling, the Lions drew a bye in the first round of state qualifying play while the Warriors face Jefferson a week from Monday.

If Washington wins, a rematch with Linn-Mar would be next up on the following Thursday. The winner of that one meets the winner of Prairie/Pleasant Valley for a trip to the Cedar Rapids Ice Arena for the state meet.

"We've had some good solid wins over some good teams," according to Linn-Mar's Downing. "This team has been working their butts off. But we're really playing with confidence now."

So are the Warriors.

"We're coming together as a team," said Washington's Franklin. "We've been battling the top teams in our conference, and we're starting to believe in ourselves."

MVC VOLLEYBALL TOURNAMENT

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CHAMPIONSHIP QUARTERFINALS

Cedar Falls def. Xavier, 25-17, 24-26, 15-7

Hempstead def. Iowa City High, 25-23, 22-25, 15-13

Washington def. Linn-Mar 25-18, 25-13

Wahlert def. Prairie, 25-23, 25-22

CHAMPIONSHIP SEMIFINALS

Hempstead def. Cedar Falls, 27-25, 25-20

Washington def. Wahlert, 25-13, 25-20

CHAMPIONSHIP FINALS

Hempstead def. Washington, 25-21, 25-19

CONSOLATION QUARTERFINALS

Iowa City West def. Jefferson, 25-19, 25-14

Waterloo West def. Waterloo East, 25-23, 25-17

CONSOLATION SEMIFINALS

Iowa City West def. Dubuque Senior, 25-18, 25-20

Kennedy def. Waterloo West, 25-21, 25-20

CONSOLATION FINALS

Kennedy def. Iowa City West, 25-20, 25-23

POOL STANDINGS

POOL A: I.C. High 3-0, Prairie 1-2, Dubuque Senior 1-2, Waterloo West 1-2.

POOL B: Washington 2-1, Xavier 2-1, Kennedy 2-1, Jefferson 0-3.

POOL C: Wahlert 2-1, Hempstead 1-2, Waterloo East 0-3.

POOL D: Cedar Falls 3-0, Linn-Mar 2-1, Iowa City West 1-2

WASHINGTON RESULTS

Defeated Kennedy, 21-11, 21-16

Lost to Xavier, 11-21, 21-19, 15-12

Defeated Jefferson, 21-7, 21-8

Defeated Linn-Mar, 25-18, 25-13

Defeated Wahlert 25-13, 25-20

Lost to Hempstead, 25-21, 25-19

XAVIER RESULTS

Defeated Jefferson, 21-7, 21-12

Defeated Washington, 11-21, 21-19, 15-12

Lost to Kennedy, 14-21, 22-20, 15-13

Lost to Cedar Falls, 25-17, 24-26, 15-7

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LINN-MAR RESULTS

Lost to Cedar Falls, 21-13, 21-14

Defeated Iowa City West, 16-21, 21-14, 19-17

Defeated Hempstead, 23-21, 21-10

Lost to Washington, 25-18, 25-13

PRAIRIE RESULTS

Lost to Iowa City High, 21-11, 21-17

Lost to Waterloo West, 21-17, 21-16

Defeated Dubuque Senior, 21-16, 21-16

Lost to Dubuque Wahlert, 25-23, 25-22

KENNEDY RESULTS

Lost to Washington, 21-11, 21-16

Defeated Jefferson, 21-10, 21-13

Defeated Xavier, 14-21, 22-20, 15-13

Defeated Waterloo West, 25-21, 25-20

Defeated Iowa City West, 25-20, 25-23

JEFFERSON RESULTS

Lost to Xavier, 21-7, 21-12

Lost to Kennedy, 21-10, 21-13

Lost to Washington, 21-7, 21-8

Lost to Iowa City West, 25-19, 25-14