

Comeback Cougars rally past Warriors

Written by Tom Fruehling

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Kennedy sparkplug and eternal optimist Maddy Meier said the match was never in doubt.

Not even when the Washington girls were up two sets to none and had all-stater Dani Franklin serving with a 25-24 lead for match point.

“I knew we weren't going to lose,” said Meier, the heart and soul of a scrappy Cougar squad that pulled out an improbable 3-2 comeback victory at home Tuesday night.

“We haven't lost to Washington in I don't know how long. We weren't going to be the team that lost to them.

“We were just not going to lose, period.”

Of all times for the usually unflappable Franklin to flub, she did it by hitting a line-drive serve into the net on match point in Game 3.

Two more unforced errors by the Warriors and Kennedy claimed the set, 27-25, to stay alive.

“We made three mistakes in a row and that cost us the game,” said a somewhat disbelieving Washington Coach Amy Faulkner. “That broke our momentum. After that, we let Kennedy control the game.”

Suddenly energized after barely escaping the jaws of defeat, the Cougars took a 4-3 lead in Game 4 on a kill by long-limbed 6-foot-2 Brinley Milbrath and never looked back.

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Milbrath, a springboard sophomore who had been quiet much of the night, smashed another spike to put Kennedy ahead 18-11.

Warrior senior Kellie Walters cut the lead to four with a kill of her own and two straight ace serves, but the Cougars recouped and evened the match at 2-2 with a 25-15 win.

Disheartened and out of gas by that time, Washington dropped the decisive game 15-9.

“Once we got the momentum, we didn't let up,” said Meier. “We just kept pushing.”

Washington dominated the first two sets. The Warriors took an early lead in both and sailed 25-14, 25-17.

The always dependable Aleena Hobbs was particularly effective, both with her outside hitting and defensive stops for Washington. And their big front line seemed to score kills at will.

“But then we kind of went to a different defense,” explained Kennedy senior Jady Gilson. “We started getting more blocks on their outside hitters.”

Gilson, an upfront force all night, admitted she wasn't so sure her team was going to pull off the miraculous comeback.

“We started off so slow, I was getting really nervous,” she said. “But our coaches believed in us.”

And Meier all but willed them to win.

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“When we were tied at 25-25 in Game 3 and got those next two points, I knew we'd be OK. We just kept pushing. We played strong the rest of the way.”

The Cougars improved their record to 9-6. Washington is 7-7.

The match didn't count in the conference standings because the teams are in different divisions.