

Kennedy finally 'clicks' against Bobcats

Written by Tom Fruehling
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The Kennedy girls had everything clicking on their home volleyball court Monday night, most especially their heels.

It what might well be called the “Cougar Click,” they’ve reclaimed a school tradition of jumping up and clicking their heels together behind them whenever they score an ace.

In unison.

And not just the players on the court, either, but those on the bench as well.

“It’s something that the girls used to do,” explained stringbean senior star Lexi Rogers. “We decided to start doing it again this year. It’s sort of a celebration and a way to get us fired up.”

Rogers and fellow front-line attackers Jordan Calef and Erin Coker each recorded nine kills in leading the Class 5A ninth-ranked Cougars (23-12) to a hard-fought, three-set sweep over Marshalltown (22-17) in the opening round of regional play.

Kennedy, which has advanced to the state tournament semifinals four straight years, will now face Waterloo West (20-17) Thursday night on the Wahawks' home floor.

Beating the Marshalltown Bobcats wasn’t easy.

The first two games went back and forth, but the Cougars pulled out both of them in the end 25-23. Then, in the third set, each team failed to convert twice on set point leads until Kennedy finally prevailed, 30-28.

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"I'm pleased that we won," said Cougar Coach Michelle Goodall. "But we have to pay more attention to some details as we go through the regionals."

The veteran coach said she felt her squad started out slow.

"I thought we were a little complacent in the first two games," she said. "Our serving game was off, and our passing game was a little off, too."

Goodall said it might have been a case of nerves among some younger players not accustomed to the pressures of tournament play. And she said the defense was too focused on stopping the Bobcats' ferocious outside hitter Eisha Oden.

"She's a difficult matchup," Goodall said. "We made some adjustments and went back to the defense we're more comfortable with. That helped us."

Rogers admitted that Marshalltown posed a more formidable foe than expected.

"I think we came out a little unprepared," she said. "But our defense picked up. And when our defense is on, that really helps our hitters."

Bre Boote led her team with 26 assists and fireplug libero Madi Meier recorded 15 digs.

Goodall also singled out freshman Rylee Mitchell and senior Taylor Steffans for their contributions off the bench.

"Rylee did a nice job of setting in the third set," the coach said. "And Taylor was seven for seven serving with one ace."

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Her ace, of course, led to 18 girls leaping up and doing their imitation of Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz.

“We’ll be ready Thursday at Waterloo,” Rogers promised. “We’re coming together as a team at just the right time.”