

Cougars make strong run in MVC tourney

Written by Tom Fruehling

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After winning five straight matches Saturday, the Kennedy girls finally ran out of steam and had to settle for second place to Iowa City High in the 14-team Mississippi Valley Conference volleyball tournament.

Along the way, the Cougars got revenge for regular-season losses to Iowa City West and Linn-Mar. And they beat City High in three games in pool play during the morning session.

But in the championship final the Little Hawks found their groove and posted a dominating 25-16 25-16 victory.

"I think the kids were kind of zapped at the end," said Kennedy Coach Michelle Goodall. "And Iowa City came out on fire."

Ranked eighth in Class 5A, City High (21-9) came into the tourney as the top seed with the only unblemished MVC record of 6-0. The Class 5A 10th-ranked Cougars (25-11) were seeded eighth based on their 4-2 conference mark.

"We played a great tournament today," Goodall said. "As a team, every single girl played very well."

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“We don’t really have a superstar, but we’re fortunate that each girl is capable of playing different positions. That gives us different matchups.

“I really think we’re peaking at the perfect time.”

The Cougars rolled over Waterloo East, Dubuque Senior and City High in pool play, then beat Iowa City West in a hard-fought three-game set in the first round of championship bracket play.

“That was a knock-down drag-out match,” Goodall said.

With just a six-minute break, they came right back to beat Linn-Mar and then had to face City High in a rematch within another six minutes. The Little Hawks enjoyed longer breaks between games.

“Playing back-to-back-to-back games like that was kind of tough,” said Kennedy junior star setter Anna Fluent. “The West game was one of most exciting I’ve ever played in and definitely the best game we’ve had all year.

“All day we kept our heads up and were able bounce back after losing a couple of points. But in the last game (against City High) we weren’t able to stop their runs.”

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Tourney host Linn-Mar (26-11) sailed through pool play with three wins and then topped Jefferson (15-20) in the opening match of the championship bracket. The Lions were then ousted by Kennedy in the semifinals.

“I feel really good about the day,” said second-year Linn-Mar Coach Teresa Kehe. “We were awesome in the morning and avenged (previous) losses to Wahlert and Prairie.

“We took care of the ball, reduced our errors and played aggressive. And against Jefferson our blockers did a good job on (Amanda) Ollinger. You can’t stop her from getting kills, but we held her.”

Among those in the middle of the front line for the Lions, senior Sami Boekhoff led the team with 23 kills for the day and 12 blocks.

Jefferson junior superstar Ollinger again paced the J-Hawks as they went 2-2 on the day, beating Xavier in three grueling games in the first match of the morning and losing to Cedar Falls before bouncing back to top Waterloo West.

In four matches, Ollinger recorded 48 kills and also posted 26 digs. Freshman Madison Slagle had 24 digs, while sophomore setter Avery Guy notched 57 assists on the day.

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Only five teams are left in the MVC tournament, and the Cougars are one of the favorites to win it. "It's a really good feeling, but it's not as easy as it looks," says head coach Tom Fruehling. "But sometimes, it's just not your day."