

Wash tournament had something for everyone

Written by Tom Fruehling

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A star-studded 12-team field Saturday at the 24th annual Washington Warrior Invitational volleyball tournament showed once again that class doesn't really matter.

In the championship finals, Class 5A fourth-ranked Johnston survived Class 3A top-ranked Solon in three games.

But throughout the day-long tourney with seven ranked teams, little schools battled big ones on an equal footing.

From the Metro area, highly ranked Class 4A Marion and Class 5A Linn-Mar both made the championship semifinals. And unranked Jefferson fell to Johnston in the quarterfinals.

"We came really close to both Johnston and Solon," said J-Hawk Coach Mary Kay Van Oort. "To think we played that well that against such impressive competition that's here today is a good day. And I know we can play even better."

Linn-Mar, ranked seventh in Class 5A, lost to Solon in the semifinals but was the only team to beat Johnston all day. The Lions marched through their first four matches unscathed before dropping a nail-biter to always-potent Solon.

"It was a tough loss, but we were playing a great team," said Linn-Mar Coach Teresa Kehe. "We lost five senior starters, so we're building off of each match. These girls are persistent. They don't want to let the ball drop."

Coach Roxanne Paulsen of the third-ranked Marion Indians said the experience of playing such top-flight competition will pay dividends for her veteran squad.

Her team beat Solon in three games but fell to Johnston in two games by a total of four points.

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“We had them on the ropes and couldn’t put them away,” Paulsen said. “But our girls stepped up and played well all day.”

Xavier, which came in ranked No.11 in Class 4A, was relegated to the consolation bracket after losing a playoff game against Beckman Catholic but bounced back to win its final two matches for the consolation championship.

“We had our ups and downs,” said first-year Saints Coach Katie Bailey. “There were some fantastic teams in the tournament, so it was really good competition.”

Saints senior star Kayla Torson felt her rebuilding squad improved as the day progressed.

“We fixed a lot of things as the day went on,” noted the jumping-jack big hitter. “By the end, we’d really picked it up.”

Host Washington, faced with trying to replace graduated superstars Dani Franklin and Aleena Hobbs, lost all four of its Saturday matches. But Coach Amy Faulkner nevertheless saw some things she liked.

“We’ve got a lot of inexperienced players,” she said. “But we gave Solon a good game. We just take one game at a time and get better each game.”