

## Warriors click on Senior Night

Written by Tom Fruehling

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In a hit-and-miss year, the Washington volleyball team has always had the parts for a peak performance.

At last, on Senior Night in their home gym Tuesday, the Warriors put all the pieces together and closed out the regular season with a decisive three-set thumping of Linn-Mar.

By winning 25-21, 25-20, 25-19, they overcame a couple of bugaboos that have plagued them all year: When they grabbed a lead, they didn't let go. And when they fell behind, they rallied back.

"We've been so close in so many games," said senior co-captain Dani Franklin. "We've been right there.

"Tonight, we were finally able to get over the hill. We stayed calm and just kept pushing."

Fellow co-captain Aleena Hobbs felt there was extra adrenaline for the final regular-season home game for the squad's 10 seniors.

"We came out excited and with a lot of energy," she said. "We had the mentality that we were not going to lose."

Hobbs has been a steady presence all season long, not only for her timely kills but also with crucial defensive saves. With the third game tied at 18-18 Tuesday night, she showed both.

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Diving after a rocket slam from Linn-Mar's Abby McGowan, she was able to tip the ball high to the front court. She then rushed to the net, took a pass from Victoria Atkins and returned a monster spike of her own for the go-ahead point.

Hobbs had two more kills as the Warriors scored seven of the last eight points to clinch the match. After trailing 17-12, they put together a 13-2 run.

In the game before, the Lions had started fast with big kills from Aryn Jones and took a 17-13 lead. With Franklin providing much of the firepower (including a game-ending ace serve), Washington went on a 12-3 tear and scored the last seven in a row.

"Even though we were down in those two sets, the girls never lost their poise," said Warrior Coach Amy Faulkner. "They didn't hang their heads. They just took control.

"That's the thing that's been hanging over our heads for the past four weeks or so. Tonight, we played all out, start to finish."

Against a hard-swinging Lions frontcourt, the Warriors more than held their own with Adkins and senior Octavia Cox clogging up the middle. The tone was set in the opening set when the two teams traded points to a 20-20 tie.

Instead of folding down the stretch, Washington took charge with Franklin and Hobbs each recording two kills in a 5-1 finish.

"Dani and Aleena are always our go-to hitters," Faulkner said. "We can count on them to put it on the ground. We know when the pressure is on, they can get us points."

As usual, the pair led their team in kills: Franklin with 17, Hobbs with 12. But Faulkner pointed out they're only as good as teammates who set them up, particularly senior libero Alisa Gerhold.

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"She's been playing great lately," her coach said. "Her serve reception was really good tonight. She was relaxed and made some nice passes to set up the offense."

For her part, Gerhold said the whole team came into the match with a new attitude.

"I think we really concentrated tonight," she said. "And we didn't get down if we made a mistake. We just went on to the next point."

All in all, said Faulkner, it was a good way to celebrate Senior Night.

"The girls wanted to go out with a bang," she said. "I've been with a lot of these girls for five years now, and I couldn't be more proud."

Washington enters regional play at 16-19 overall (4-2 MVC Valley Division), while Linn-Mar is 23-14 (2-4 MVC Valley Division).