

Cougars rally to top Saints

Written by Tom Fruehling

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The young Kennedy cubs came of age Tuesday night, coming from behind to knock off Xavier, 3-2, in Mississippi Valley Conference volleyball action on the Saints' home court.

Seeming to gain confidence as the long night wore on, the Cougars clinched the match with a decisive 15-10 win in the fifth game.

"We're a young team," said Kennedy Coach Michelle Goodall. "Tonight we grew up."

Xavier (10-4, 2-1) had them on the ropes, too.

After splitting the first two sets 25-21, the Saints looked to pick up steam by winning the third, 25-16.

"That's the time we could have folded," Goodall said. "But we didn't. I'm so proud of the way the girls came back."

With their backs to the wall, they took a 2-1 lead in Game 4 on springy stringbean Brinley Milbrath's kill shot and never let up. The Cougars padded their lead to 15-6, but then the 6-foot-2 sophomore was forced to the bench with a leg cramp.

"Things got a little chaotic," admitted Goodall. "But the girls stayed strong."

The Saints, ranked No.8 in Class 4A, went on a 9-2 run with a string of kills from their potent front line. Two spikes from Xavier's Madsy Richards brought them back to within a point at

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22-21, but the Cougars closed it out for a 25-21 victory to square the match at two games apiece.

“We gave them a big lead,” Saints Coach Krista Johnson pointed out, “and it’s hard to win by trading points. We just weren’t able to dig ourselves out of the hole.”

Somewhat shaken, perhaps, by failing to close out the match, the Saints appeared to lose their mojo in the rubber set.

“Kennedy was really scrappy all night, diving for balls all over the place,” Johnson said. “Both teams fought hard. They just made fewer errors than we did. And they had a bunch of blocks.”

Although Xavier star Kayla Torson was a force, as usual, with her kill shots, she didn’t dominate the game like she usually does.

“We’re trying to get our setters to mix it up and give us more weapons,” Johnson noted. “I thought the other girls did a nice job picking it up.”

For Kennedy (8-6, 1-2), the victory marked their first five-set win of the season.

“I think we turned the corner,” Goodall said. “They’re beginning to understand the mental side of the game and show some patience on the court.”

She credited her defenders for coming through in clutch situations. “All of them played great,” Goodall said.

Senior Maddy Meier said she felt a key point came when Xavier staged its big rally in Game 4 after being down by 11 points.

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“We executed and finished out the set,” she said. “We haven't been doing that. But tonight we did.”

And after an up-and-down start to the season, fellow senior Sarah Ryder said it's time for the Cougars to go on the prowl.

“We're tired of losing,” she said. “It feels good to pull one out like this.”