

Cougars top Ankeny for state berth

Written by Tom Fruehling

Tuesday, 03 November 2015 22:45 - Last Updated Tuesday, 03 November 2015 23:00



As she was clutching “Vaughn the Monkey,” the stuffed animal team mascot for her Kennedy volleyball squad, junior Gabbie Meyer had to be told what it meant for the Cougars to “get the monkey off their back.”

All she knew was that the girls collectively before the season started a nonsensically-named “V-Ball Monkey” twitter account to whimsically communicate among themselves.

Meyer’s well-worn childhood toy monkey has been on the Kennedy bench ever since.

It’s turned into a good luck charm because Tuesday night on their home floor the inspired Cougar girls did indeed get the monkey off their back by advancing to next week’s state tournament after losing in the regional finals each of the past three years.

Senior team leader and setter-extraordinaire Anna Fluent needed no explanation for what that meant.

“Our goal from the beginning of the season was to get to state,” she said after Class 5A ninth-ranked Kennedy (29-9) whipped 15th-ranked Ankeny (24-13) in three sets. “After the last three years, we really, really wanted to win this one. Especially for the seniors, it meant so much to us. It’s the best day ever.

“Now we can’t wait ‘til next week and keep on rolling.”

Cougars top Ankeny for state berth

Written by Tom Fruehling

Tuesday, 03 November 2015 22:45 - Last Updated Tuesday, 03 November 2015 23:00

Kennedy will face Cedar Falls in the opening round at 2 p.m. Tuesday on Court 2.



The always-tough Hawkettes of Ankeny had beaten the Cougars in a West Des Moines tournament early in the season, but this time around they were no match for the well-rounded home team.

Kennedy's big front-line hitters Brinley Milbrath, Macy Anderson and Paige Franck simply dominated the net all night.

In the first set, jumping-jack senior Milbrath slammed two kills in a row to give the Cougars a 5-4 lead. Franck, a junior who is a terror from her outside position, recorded six more kills of her own as Kennedy coasted to a 25-16 win.

It was more of the same in the second set, as the senior Anderson got hot and fired eight missiles. The Cougars led from start to finish in a 25-19 victory.

The Hawkettes made a game of it in the third set, trailing early but bouncing back to take a lead at 23-22. Kennedy close strong, though, with consecutive kills from Anderson, junior Emma Boote and clutch-time specialist Milbrath.

The savvy Fluent, who set up most of the kills, said the big hitters performed at their peak level.

"It seemed like every time we set them up, they made smart shots," she said. "To be honest, I

Cougars top Ankeny for state berth

Written by Tom Fruehling

Tuesday, 03 November 2015 22:45 - Last Updated Tuesday, 03 November 2015 23:00

think this was the best we've played all year. And we played for each other, as a team."

Part of it, according to Franck, was wanting to win for the seniors to finally experience the state tournament atmosphere after stellar but unfulfilled careers.

"We were all pumped up tonight," she said. "The adrenaline was really flowing. And we pushed each other every game."

Kennedy coach Michelle Goodall, whose squad this year is both unbeaten at home and undefeated in non-tournament dual matches, said team camaraderie has been a key to the Cougars' success.

"We've got 15 girls on the roster," she said, "and all 15 contribute. If you notice in our huddles, the kids on the bench are the eyes for the athletes on the floor. They're always giving them feedback."

And then there's Vaughn the Monkey, of course.

Silly as it might seem, said Gabbie Meyer, "I really do think that has helped bring our team together."

The other first-round pairings at the state tournament are Dowling against Hempstead, Johnston against Ankeny Centennial, and Bettendorf against Iowa City West. If Kennedy defeats Cedar Falls, it will face Bettendorf or Iowa City West in the semifinals.