

Marion tests Solon before falling

Written by Tom Fruehling

Thursday, 17 October 2013 22:31 - Last Updated Thursday, 17 October 2013 23:05



For the Marion High School volleyball team Thursday night against Independence, the third time was the charm.

They weren't so lucky, though, for the fourth time this season with mighty Solon.

Playing on their home court in the eight-team championship bracket of the Wamac Conference tournament, the spirited Indians split two matches.

After losing twice this year in tie-breaking sets to Independence, they finally beat them, 25-19, 25-16. The Class 4A third-ranked Spartans of Solon knocked them off once again, however, but only by scores of 25-22, 25-22.

West Delaware, ranked second in Class 4A, fared little better against Solon, falling 25-23, 25-22 in the championship finals.

All in all, it was a good night for the Marion girls (No.11 in Class 4A at 24-14), especially since they faced two big-striking teams without one of their front-line stalwarts.

Junior outside hitter Johanna Steggall suffered a concussion last Saturday in the Westside Invitational at Jefferson and sat out both days of this week's Wamac meet.

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“She's in practically every play,” said Marion Coach Roxanne Paulsen. “So it was tough not having her in there tonight. But I thought our two sophomore middle hitters (Olivia Frazier and Alyssa Thomas) did a nice job filling in.

“We were just very competitive throughout every game, which is something we've been stressing.”

In their opener with Independence (ranked ninth in Class 3A at 31-7), Marion was on the attack right from the get-go. Thomas, a one-woman wrecking ball, set the tone with two early spikes and finished the game with seven.

Meanwhile, junior libero Abby Phillips was sliding all over the floor for digs that more often than not went to fellow junior Amanda Sahm for top-of-the-net sets.

“All credit goes to my teammates,” said Thomas. “They gave me perfect passes.”

For her part, Sahm said the sophomore striker knows how to finish. “I love her as a hitter,” she said. “She always puts the ball down.”

The Indians seemed to keep the Mustangs out of rhythm all night. Paulsen said the strategy was to give Independence different looks by mixing up the lineup.

And her team never lost its composure.

“We came out not afraid to play,” Sahm pointed out. “We swung hard from the start and just kept swinging away.”

Marion led from start to finish in the first game, and Independence led only briefly in the

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second. With sophomore Kaela Halvorson serving, the Indians stretched the margin to 18-10 and coasted to victory.

Fittingly, two of their final two points came when Sahm lofted high lobs for Thomas to ram home.

Despite claiming only one set against Solon (now 29-2) in three previous matches, the Marion girls didn't give an inch in Thursday's semifinal. The Spartans have a fierce front line in senior Vikolia Meade and juniors Jordan Runge and Jordan Smith.

Phillips and Sahm know first-hand, having played with the two Jordans on the nationally ranked Iowa Rockets elite club team.

"Against them," said the diminutive (5-foot-3) Phillips, "you just stand still and hope you're quick enough to touch the ball."

Even at 5-foot-10, Thomas finds the trio fearsome. "Actually," she admitted, "they terrify me."

The short-handed Indians nevertheless held their ground on blocks, and Phillips along with her backcourt mates managed some miraculous digs.

"We didn't want to let anything drop," Phillips said of her team's missile defense.

The Indians got more than a few rockets of their own as the lead in both games teetered back and forth. Neither team led by more than four in either game.

In the end, Solon had just a little bit too much firepower.

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"You kind of hope you're going to stop them," Paulsen said, "or at least slow them down a little bit."

Even in defeat, though, the spunky Marion bunch was upbeat.

"We had fun tonight," Sahm said. "We were playing the game we love. And our team always plays better when we're having fun."

WAMAC TOURNAMENT

CHAMPIONSHIP BRACKET

Quarterfinals

Solon def. Beckman 2-0 (25-13, 25-19)

Western Dubuque def. Mount Vernon 2-0 (25-22, 25-21)

Marion def. Independence 2-0 (25-19, 25-16)

West Delaware def. Maquoketa 2-0 (25-15, 25-15)

Quarterfinals Consolation

Beckman def. Independence 2-0 (28-26, 25-23)

Maquoketa def. Mount Vernon 2-1 (12-25, 25-22, 15-11)

Semifinals

Solon def. Marion 2-0 (25-22, 25-22)

West Delaware def. Western Dubuque 2-1 (25-12, 14-25, 15-10)

Finals

Solon def. West Delaware 2-0 (25-23, 25-22)

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CONSOLATION BRACKET

Quarterfinals

Benton def. Anamosa 2-0 (25-7, 25-14)

Clear Creek-Amana def. Vinton-Shellsburg 2-0 (25-17, 25-22)

Williamsburg def. Central Dewitt 2-0 (25-14, 25-21)

Quarterfinals Consolation

Central Dewitt def. Anamosa 2-0 (25-12, 25-11)

Vinton-Shellsburg def. Center Point-Urbana 2-0 (25-22, 25-22)

Semifinals

Center Point-Urbana def. Clear Creek-Amana 2-0 (25-16, 25-19)

Williamsburg def. Benton Community 2-1 (23-25, 26-24, 15-11)

Finals

Center Point-Urbana def. Williamsburg 2-0 (25-16, 25-23)