

## Prairie tops No.6 Lions again

Written by Tom Fruehling

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The Prairie and Linn-Mar volleyball teams are so evenly matched that both coaches agreed the difference in their well-played battle Tuesday night came down to a mental mind-set.

Down 10-5 in the deciding fifth set on their home floor, the Prairie Hawks aggressively charged back to tie it at 11 and put away the match 15-13.

“These girls just don’t want to lose,” said first-year Prairie Coach Lynnette Stecklein. “But in the end, they were playing not to lose but playing to win. And they did it.”

Second-year Linn-Mar Coach Teresa Kehe, on the other hand, said her Class 5A sixth-ranked squad is struggling with success.

“These kids are not used to being ranked and being a top dog,” she said.

“They don’t always handle the pressure of being successful. Tonight, we weren’t as composed at the end and lacked that finishing quality.”

Razor-thin though the difference may have been, both coaches had similar assessments of the

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contest.

"A great match," noted Kehe. "Every point was hard fought."

"Awesome," said Stecklein, whose rejuvenated squad (9-3) has now won seven in a row, including a 2-0 win over the Lions in the championship match of the Linn-Mar Invitational Saturday.

The Lions opened the night Tuesday by taking a 3-2 lead in the first game and staying ahead for a 25-21 victory.

Prairie reversed things in the next game, however, leading almost all the way in a 25-17 win.

The rubber game was a match of spurts, with Linn-Mar surging ahead 13-8 before the Hawks came back to knot the score at 20-20.

The Lions snuffed the rally with a kill shot, and Emilee McGowan served the last five points in a 25-20 go-ahead set.

The 5-foot-5 Linn-Mar sophomore (who leads her team in kills) notched two big spikes to tie the fourth game at 14-14, but the much taller front line of Prairie rose to the challenge and coasted to a 25-19 win.



The Hawks' 6-foot-1 junior Kate Busswitz, who is already committed to the UNI Panthers,

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closed the scoring with a kill and did the same in the decisive final game. She also had the spike to knot the score at 11-11.

“We were focused and confident tonight,” said Busswitz, who had 12 kills and nine blocks on the evening. “We had the same feeling we had at Linn-Mar last weekend. We’re getting used to pressure situations.”

And they’re not folding under the pressure, according to senior libero Jenni Lockhart.

“It kinda got a little messy at times,” she said. “But we pulled it together.

“We stayed mentally tough and played it to win.”

Megan Sprengler led Prairie with 17 kills, while Makenzie Soeken had 10. Rachel Shelangowski recorded eight blocks.

For the Lions, senior Meg Gostonczik tallied 14 kills to along with 5-foot-7 sophomore Ellie Anderson’s 12. Anderson also led her team with 27 assists.