

## No. 9 Cougars dream about state volleyball

Written by Jim Ecker

Monday, 27 October 2014 20:02 -

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Michelle Goodall steered Kennedy High School to the semifinals of the state volleyball tournament in 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2011 during a remarkable four-year run, but the Cougars have not reached the state meet the last two seasons.

Goodall is anxious to get back to the 2014 tournament, which will be held at the U.S. Cellular Center in downtown Cedar Rapids Nov. 11-14.

"It's weird when your season ends early," Goodall said Monday night. "The kids have a little dream going on. We're hopeful of getting down there. I'm guessing every kid in the state has the same dream."

The ninth-ranked Cougars began the postseason trail Monday with a 25-19, 25-7, 25-9 victory over Cedar Rapids Washington in the Class 5A regional quarterfinals at the Kennedy gym.

Kennedy (27-11) will play at Linn-Mar (27-11) Thursday night in the regional semifinals. The regional finals will be held Tuesday, Nov. 4 at Newton with third-ranked Dowling looming in the other half of the bracket.

None of these Cougars have ever played in the state tournament. Seniors Bre Osterkamp and Hannah Skow were freshmen when Kennedy made its last trip in 2011, but they were not on the varsity. Everybody else was in middle school, dreaming about making it to the U.S. Cellular Center for the big show.

"They've talked about it," said Goodall. "'Oh, I remember in eighth grade I went down there. I remember the sea of yellow.'"

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"I'd like to get them there and give them that opportunity," she said.



Washington (5-31) gave Kennedy a good game in the first set Monday, but the Cougars took command from there and finished the match in 57 minutes.

Brinley Milbrath led the Cougars with 14 kills. Macy Anderson had 10 kills and Gabbie Meyer finished with seven kills. Anna Fluent finished with 34 assists. Allie Seelau appeared in only one game, but she had four kills in a short period of time.

It's unusual for the ninth-ranked team in the state to play in a regional opener instead of receiving a bye, but Kennedy was not ranked No. 9 when the pairings were made. The Cougars have won 16 of their last 18 matches after an 11-9 start and are playing their best volleyball of the season right now.

Goodall was happy to play Monday and begin the postseason trail.

"I'm OK with it," she remarked. "This particular year I'm OK with having a game tonight to get used to the regional format. I counted it as a blessing.

"It is interesting, though," she added. "We are probably the highest-ranked team that had a match tonight."

Linn-Mar, which was ranked earlier in the season, drew an opening-round bye heading into Thursday's match with the Cougars. The Lions and Cougars split their two matches this season.

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Linn-Mar prevailed, 3-2, on Sept. 2, but Kennedy blanked the Lions 2-0 at the Mississippi Valley Conference tournament Oct. 18.

Goodall knows it will get tougher from here as the Cougars chase a spot in the state meet.

"It's regional time. They're all going to be tough matches," she said. "It's the team that comes best-prepared and it's the team that comes confident.

"I think right now our team is confident. They're playing some good volleyball. They're learning the mental end of the game as well. And I think that's the part I'm most proud of.

"At the beginning of the season we'd get anxious and just bang the ball. They're more in control now."