

Mustangs take care of Missouri Valley

Written by Jim Ecker

Saturday, 09 March 2019 08:22 - Last Updated Saturday, 09 March 2019 08:26



The Mount Mercy men's volleyball team has three shiny victories over ranked teams this season, but now their matches against non-ranked opponents have taken on extra meaning.

The Mustangs are chasing at least a share of the Heart of America Conference title, something they'll achieve if they do not lose another conference match this year.

The ninth-ranked Mustangs took a step in the right direction Friday night with a 3-1 victory over Missouri Valley at the Hennessey Recreation Center. The set scores were 25-21, 25-14, 23-25 and 25-17.

Grand View, the defending national champions, tops the Heart of America Conference standings with an 8-1 record. Mount Mercy is sitting in second place at 6-1 in the 10-game campaign.

For Mount Mercy, the goal is to win their final three matches in the league and clinch at least a share of first place at 9-1.

The Mustangs upset Grand View when the Vikings were ranked No. 1 earlier in the season, but Grand View gained a measure of revenge by defeating the Mustangs this past Wednesday.

Now the race is on for the title. If Grand View and Mount Mercy tie for the regular-season crown, the Vikings will get the No. 1 seed for the conference tournament and the Mustangs will be the No. 2 seed based on a tiebreaker.

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The No. 2 seed would get a bye in the first round of the conference tournament and would automatically advance to the semifinals.

"That's our goal right now," Coach Mary Kay Van Oort said Friday night. "That's our focus, which would be a really fabulous place for us to be."

After the Mustangs lost to Grand View, Van Oort stressed the importance of winning the rest of the league matches against Graceland, Culver-Stockton and 10th-ranked Clarke in pursuit of the title.

"Those are the ones that are maybe even more important to get us to where we need to be at the end," she said.

The journey begins with a home match against Graceland on Saturday at 2 p.m. The matches against Culver-Stockton and Clarke will be on the road.

Evan Gaskill led Mount Mercy with 15 kills against Missouri Valley. Nikola Stoimenov had 14 kills and Ben Steffen collected 11.

Andrew Colantone rolled up 45 assists. Mitchell Wannahwilai made 12 digs. Ben Steffen and Strahil Svilenski had three blocks for the Mustangs, who raised their overall record to 14-6.

Missouri Valley fell to 7-8 overall and 2-5 in the conference.