

Cougars clinch title without Goodall

Written by Jim Ecker

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Cedar Rapids Kennedy volleyball coach Michelle Goodall was halfway around the world Tuesday at a special event in the Philippines, but that did not stop her talented and well-coached team from having a successful night back home.

The fifth-ranked Cougars topped Jefferson, 25-16, 25-12, 25-21, at the Kennedy gym to clinch at least a tie for just the second Mississippi Valley Conference title in school history.

Kennedy can win an outright Valley Division crown with a victory at Dubuque Senior Tuesday night with Goodball back in the USA.

Kennedy has been a state volleyball power for many years under Goodall, but conference titles have been hard to come by in a tough league. The Cougars are 5-0 in the Valley Division and want to finish 6-0 with an unblemished flag.

"That would be amazing," senior Macy Anderson said. "That's huge for our program."

Kennedy won an MVC title in 2006 when these Cougars were in grade school. Now they want a banner of their own to hang in the gym, so there will be plenty of incentive next Tuesday in Dubuque.

"A little bit," said Brinley Milbrath with a smile, deliberately understating the case. "We want to get that."

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Winning an outright conference title is one goal for the Cougars, but not the ultimate goal.

"These last three years we haven't been to state," said Anderson, a senior, "so that's another huge goal for us."

Goodall, who is active with USA Volleyball, is in the Philippines as part of a special U.S. Sports Envoy Program to give a series of volleyball clinics and community outreach events. The purpose of the program is to advance the rights and participation of girls in sports.

"We're so proud of her," Anderson said. "We know what a great coach she is. She'll be awesome with the kids in the Philippines, too."

Kennedy assistant coach Tim Johnson ran the Cougars on Tuesday night and was proud of their effort.

"I thought they played really good," he said. "That was one of the messages we sent them: Jefferson has taken a lot of games from people and I just wanted to make sure they didn't take anybody lightly."

"I thought the girls kept their composure out there. You saw it in Game 3."

Kennedy cruised in the first two sets, but Jefferson rallied and had a 20-19 lead in the third set and appeared ready to extend the evening. The Cougars had other ideas and won six of the next seven points for a 25-21 verdict.

The Cougars did not miss a beat with Johnson calling the shots. "It was definitely different, but Coach Johnson knows what to do and we're used to him, too," Anderson said.

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Goodall asked all of her players to give her words of empowerment to take on her trip to the Philippines.

"I put passion and perseverance," Anderson said.

"Some of the words that I put were passion, courage and leadership," Milbrath said. "Goodall preaches that every game."

Goodall reached out to her team Tuesday from overseas.

"She sent us a text today," Milbrath said, "all the way from the Philippines: Be grateful for everything you have, because some people don't have it."