

Warriors spike Prairie in straight sets

Written by Tom Fruehling

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For the Cedar Rapids Washington volleyball team, a new coach means pretty much the same system that took them to within one match of the state tournament last year.

One in a bunch of first-year Metro coaches, Amy Faulkner took over the Warrior program on the first day of practice in August when former mentor Kari Lombardi resigned to move with her family to West Des Moines.

Faulkner is hardly a rookie, however, having served as an assistant the past three years and as a club-team coach for many of the girls before that.

Still, it was a milestone of sorts for her team to notch its first really convincing victory of the young season Tuesday night by sweeping Prairie in three sets on the Hawks' home court.

They'd beaten Dubuque Wahlert in four long games to open the year, then lost three of four last Saturday against a tough field in their own invitational tournament.

"It felt good to come in and get three wins over a great Prairie team," Faulkner said. "With Wahlert, we gave up a lot of extra points. Tonight, we won our first one and never let up."

Indeed, the Warriors barely trailed all night in their 25-23, 25-20, 27-25 trifecta.

"We started out strong. That was important for us," said sophomore Victoria Adkins, a new starter who shares set-up duties with senior Callie Cook. "And we never lost our energy. We really worked together as a team."

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Adkins led the squad with 14 assists, while Cook had nine.

In the opener Tuesday, the Hawks' 6-foot striker Meghan Busswitz recorded four kills early to put her team up 13-12. Washington inched ahead, though, and took a 23-18 lead on a serving ace by the hard-to-hit lefty Adkins.

The Warriors finally put the game away on a smash by always-lethal all-conference senior Dani Franklin.

"We gave it our all all night," said Busswitz, who forms a formidable front line with sophomore little sister Kaitlyn at 6-foot-1 and junior Megan Sprengeler. "We just couldn't seem to put all the pieces together. For one thing, we need to work on our back-line defense."

Washington broke a tie in the second set with steady senior Aleena Hobbs serving to go ahead 12-9 and never trailed again. Hobbs also served the winning point.

"Aleena is kind of our silent destroyer," said Faulkner. "She always keeps her composure, doesn't make many mistakes and always seems to get to the ball."

Hobbs is also a potent hitter who recorded five kills on the night to go with co-captain Franklin's team-leading eight.

"We've got some new girls filling spots," said Hobbs. "But I think we're jelling as a team. I just try to keep everyone together and not let them get discouraged."

While she was the steadying force in the first two sets, Franklin came alive in the closer with some big kills, blocks at the net and even an ace serve that gave the Warriors a 21-14 lead.

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The Hawks clawed back, however, with the two Busswitz girls doing much of the damage. They eventually knotted the score at 23-all but couldn't get a lead.

“We wanted to give people their money's worth,” quipped Faulkner of the big lead that was lost.

Prairie Coach Kevin Geary said he wasn't disappointed in his team's effort but was concerned by poor execution.

“We battled all the way,” he said. “Nobody rolled over. We fought hard, but our passing and our hitting broke down at times.

“We have to be more consistent. We have the tools, the talent. We just have to put it all together.”

Washington improved its MVC conference record to 2-0 (3-4 overall), while Prairie is now 1-1 (2-3 overall).