

Published Dec 4, 2010
Published Saturday December 4, 2010

No. 10 Gophers end Jays' tournament stay

By Heather Rule
SPECIAL TO THE WORLD-HERALD



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Minnesota celebrates at the end of their third and clinching NCAA college volleyball tournament game against Creighton in Minneapolis, Saturday, Dec. 4, 2010.

MINNEAPOLIS — Don't stop believing. That's the attitude the Creighton volleyball team showed throughout its second-round match against 10th-ranked Minnesota.

The Bluejays saw their season end with a 3-0 loss to the No. 10-ranked Gophers. In its first-ever NCAA tournament appearance, Creighton (21-12) gave Minnesota (26-8) a good battle Saturday night at the University of Minnesota Sports Pavilion.

The match consisted of tight, back-and-forth play for much of the night. Creighton came out of the gate ready to play, but just couldn't capitalize on finishing off sets.

"Minnesota's a great team," Creighton coach Kirsten Bernthal Booth said. "We knew we'd have to battle hard. I thought we were competitive every single game."

Set one played out like a see-saw between the two teams. They took turns winning a point or two each until the score was knotted at 17-17. Then Minnesota broke it open with a 5-0 run that essentially won it the set, 25-19.

Creighton went on a 7-1 run to erase a 15-10 deficit in the second set. That returned the match to the back-and-forth play of the first set.

"We had no emotion in the beginning," said CU junior middle blocker Laurel Sanford. "We needed a spark. We weren't going to give up. That is for sure."

Creighton rallied again at 22-24, but Minnesota was able to put three points together to finally seal the set, and the 2-0 lead, with a 30-28 score.

The Gophers rallied late again in the final set to seal the match 25-20. With the win, Minnesota earned a spot in the Sweet 16 and moves on to the NCAA regionals next weekend in Seattle.

Minnesota coach Mike Hebert was impressed with the Bluejays, saying they outERVED the Gophers.

"It's obvious there are a lot of really good volleyball teams playing in Division I right now, because we just played one of them," Hebert said. "A very well-coached team."

Maybe the toughest task of the night for Creighton was containing Minnesota's standout freshman outside hitter Ashley Wittman. She led the way with 19 kills.

"We didn't expect Wittman to eat us up as much as she did," Booth said. "She got a boatload of swings."

Sanford put up 12 kills for Creighton, marking the 12th time this season she has hit double-digits in that column. She grew up in the Twin Cities suburb of Eagan and said it was "surreal" to be playing back in Minnesota as a college athlete.

"I grew up with Minnesota volleyball, dreaming I would be a Minnesota volleyball player," Sanford said. "Just being able to be back in the pavilion and playing in front of my Minnesota crowd, and in front of the Minnesota volleyball players, is pretty fun."

Since it was the 12th consecutive NCAA tourney for the Gophers, and the first for Creighton, it might be easy for Booth to point to a lack of experience. But she didn't.

"I told the players that I feel the same tonight as I did last night," Booth said. "I am extremely proud of them. It has been a great season."

Creighton (21-2).....19 28 20

Minnesota (26-8).....25 30 25

Creighton (kills-aces-blocks): Sanford 12-3-0, Thorson 8-0-0, Oelke 7-0-1, Bober 6-0-1, Boggs 0-0-0, Mandolfo 0-0-0, Benitez 0-0-0, Runge 2-0-0, Almgren 7-0-0.

Minnesota (kills-aces-blocks): Gibbemeyer 8-0-0, Dixon 12-0-4, Tabberson 4-0-0, Harms 5-0-0, Sooter 0-0-0, Wittman 19-0-0, Granquist 0-0-0, Love 9-0-0.

Set assists: Minnesota 57 (Gibbemeyer 1, Tabberson 48, Harms 3, Sooter 1, Wittman 1, Granquist 3); Creighton 41 (Sanford 1, Oelke 1, Bober 31, Boggs 2, Benitez 5, Almgren 1).

Contact the writer:

402-444-1201, sports@owh.com

Copyright ©2010 Omaha World-Herald®. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten, displayed or redistributed for any purpose without permission from the Omaha World-Herald.