

Volleyball team grabs tourney slot

By HANNAH BOTT
STAFF WRITER

When you put hard work, determination and natural talent together, you have a recipe for success. The women's volleyball team has mastered that recipe this season and secured the MIAC's automatic berth into the NCAA Division III playoffs.

This started when St. Thomas, the top seed in the MIAC playoffs, won the MIAC semifinal playoff match against fifth-seed St. Olaf in a 3-1 win last Thursday night, Nov. 6, at Schoe-necker Arena.

St. Thomas had a rocky start, losing the first set to St. Olaf 25-27. But the team came back strong, winning the next three sets 25-18, 25-17, 25-8, ending in a victory for St. Thomas.

"It felt good to beat [St. Olaf] because we were expected to win, because we are the top seed, so it's good to prove that we're a force to be reckoned with," senior Katie Kremer said.

Senior Katie McCaffrey had 12 kills and six blocks, sophomore Emily Foster had 36 assists, 13 digs and six blocks, and Kremer had 14 digs. Kremer now has a MIAC record with 2,490 digs in 445 games.

Sophomore Charlie Waibel had 12 kills and 11 digs, junior Kyle Crotty had nine kills and seven digs, and sophomore Alesha Nelsen had eight kills and four blocks.

Senior Jen Gall said the shaky start scared her; senior fan Bailey Rowell agreed, saying that the volleyball women "came a little flat but finished with a fizz."

St. Thomas then faced second-seed Gustavus last Saturday night, Nov. 8, at home. Gustavus had its 11-match winning streak stopped when St. Thomas won 25-20, 25-22, 23-25, 25-15.

"I think we're doing really well," Gall said. "We've been undefeated in the MIAC the past two years, and we have such good talent and a great coaching staff. When you put it all together what else can you get?"

Their record offers a fairly clear answer to that question.

"We have definitely started coming together as a team," Crotty said. "If we all bring our best together we can go

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really far, and it's really exciting."

St. Thomas is ranked sixth in the region and has swept the MIAC regular-season and playoff titles for the third time in four seasons.

"We're really good at digging and blocking, and the fact that we play so well together is because we know each other's strengths and weaknesses, so we know how to counter and pick each other back up," Kremer said.

Even with defensive strength, Crotty believes the players have weaknesses they could work on as well.

"We're all extremely competitive," Crotty said, "so when things don't go the way we want, we get frustrated with ourselves or others. It's definitely something we're trying to work on."

St. Thomas will now play host to an eight-team NCAA Division III regional tournament that started this Thursday, Nov. 13.

The women have high hopes for the tournament.

"There are lots of good teams, so every game is going to be a tough one," Crotty said. "We want to go all the way. We want to be national champions. So we're setting our goals high and we hope we can meet them."

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Life spent on ice

■ Terry Skrypek's life revolves around hockey, and the men's hockey coach is five wins short of 400 in his St. Thomas career.

By HEATHER RULE
SPORTS EDITOR

Terry Skrypek has never had a losing season. He has spent 46 years around hockey as a prep player and a coach, and he has seen more success than many coaches can ever hope for.

Skrypek, who will be 61 in January and is now in his 22nd season as the head coach of the men's hockey team, has been lacing up his skates since he was 4 years old. He grew up in the Midway neighborhood of St. Paul and spent a lot of time at the nearby playground ice rink. Even from an early age, he "fell in love with the sport."

"I just loved the game," he said. "And I always thought that I'd like to coach it some day, and I was able to do that."

He is one of the top coaches in all divisions of hockey and started this season just six wins shy of 400 as a coach. He belongs to the Athletic Halls of Fame at both St. Thomas and St. Mary's University, where he was a four-year letter winner as a player.

He was a three-sport athlete, playing football, hockey and baseball at Cretin-Derham Hall. He played four years of hockey at St. Mary's and played a year of semi-professional exhibition hockey.

Skrypek got a teaching job at Hill High School, an all-boys private Catholic school that a year later became Hill-Murray. He coached hockey for 17 years at Hill-Murray, 14 as the head coach. He also coached football and baseball.

He taught English for his first eight years, and then switched to physical education. Skrypek switched his major three times in college before settling on education, due to his passion for coaching.

"In those days, the only way that you could coach is if you were in education," Skrypek said.

Hill-Murray was, and remains, one of the state's hockey powerhouses. Under Skrypek the program made 12 trips to the state tournament and took home a state title in 1983 after winning 88 percent of its games. Skrypek finished with a 325-42-2 record.

Along with many third-place finishes at state, the team had two runner-up finishes under Skrypek, one coming in a memorable 1980 season. That year Hill-Murray won its first 27 games to make it to the state championship game, but lost 2-1 to Grand Rapids.



HEATHER RULE/THE AQUIN

Coach Terry Skrypek is among the top 70 of all-time, all-division college hockey coaches.

After Hill-Murray, he saw an opportunity to coach at another level and face some new challenges. Skrypek came to St. Thomas in 1987. He teaches Physical Education 100 and was also an assistant baseball coach in his first year at the university.

"I think I've always been kind of a goal setter, in terms of my professional life," Skrypek said. "And I wanted to test myself a little bit. I wanted to see if I could coach at this level."

Skrypek found out that making the transition from high school hockey into the collegiate level was not easy.

"It was an adjustment for me," he said. "College hockey is a lot different than high school hockey. The level of play increased quite a bit."

Skrypek has brought impressive numbers to the St. Thomas program. His career record is 394-175-39 (.680) through last season, and a 258-59-19 (.801) record in the MIAC. With his wins, he is among the top 70 of all-time, all-division hockey coaches. His teams have 12 conference titles and they are the lone school in the conference to advance to a NCAA national championship game. Skrypek was also proud of stringing seven MIAC titles together from 1989 to 1995 calling it a "great feat" and a "great tribute to the players."

Two seasons at St. Thomas stick out in Skrypek's mind: 1999-2000 and 2004-05, when the Tommies went to the national title games. They lost to Norwich University 2-1 in 2000. In 2005 the team rallied for a run to the title game again. They had some big upset wins on the journey to the NCAA championship, but were shutout 5-0 by Middlebury College. Skrypek was named Division III National Coach of the Year at the end of that season.

Players appreciate Skrypek's competitive nature, knowledge of the game and his approachable personality.

"You're able to be yourself around him," senior forward Tom Knutson said. "I like that I can go talk to him. We're lucky to be at a school with such a great coach."

Skrypek said he considers himself a teacher of the game and believes in perfecting fundamentals. He said the old cliché about "you're going to play the way you practice" rings true.

"We try to make our practices very specific to the game itself," he said. "There's a lot to be learned through the sport of hockey."

Players are also astonished at Skrypek's 46 years in hockey. Senior defenseman Adam Davis called this high number "unheard of."

"That's a long time to be doing anything," Davis said. "It's amazing."

Since Skrypek has been around the game for nearly a half century, one has to wonder how long his face will be a fixture behind the bench.

"It's day-to-day," he said. "It's been a long time. The years have flown by."

He said he re-evaluates himself at the end of each season. His age and health are factors in how many more seasons he tacks on to his coaching career. He has had both knees and hips replaced, but that has not stopped him from coaching.

"It gets to a point where I think everybody knows when it's time to get out," Skrypek said. "And it's getting tougher. I think the beauty of it is I skate better now than I did 10 years ago."

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TWO-MINUTE DRILL

SPORTS INFORMATION

A homecoming comeback

The football team improved its record to 6-3 (5-3 in the MIAC) with a 36-20 homecoming win over Bethel (4-5, 3-4 MIAC) Nov. 8.

The Tommies got off to a shaky start and fell into a 13-0 hole early, but were led by freshman quarterback Greg Morse, who came off the bench to march down the field for five consecutive touchdown drives. Morse had 11 completions out of 16 passes totaling 130 yards, two touchdowns and no interceptions.

Freshman running back Colin Tobin racked up 137 yards on the day, and sophomore Ben Wartman came up with another 125 yards, his sixth 100-plus yard rushing game this season. St. Thomas also outgained Bethel in total

yardage by a large margin of 398 to 179. Freshman Fritz Waldvogel had seven catches in the game for 75 yards and two touchdowns.

The St. Thomas defense kept the Royals at bay by allowing just 39 passing yards and snagging three interceptions and a fumble, all of which came in the second half.

Rough weekend for men's hockey

St. Thomas was outscored 8 to 1 on the weekend in losses against UW-Eau Claire Nov. 7 (6-0) and UW-Stevens Point Nov. 8 (2-1). The Tommies are now 1-2-1 with a bye for the first weekend of conference play. The pair of losses to the unbeaten teams dropped St. Thomas from the DIII national rankings as the team was ranked No. 5 entering the weekend.

After four goals in the second period of the loss at

Eau Claire, junior goalie Tyler Chestnut was replaced by sophomore Sean Deichert for the final 20 minutes.

The Tommies lost a close game at Stevens Point as the game-winning goal was punched in with only 33 seconds left in regulation. Chestnut was back in goal and stopped 23 of 25 shots.

Women's hockey has 2-0 start

The No. 10-ranked Tommies beat non-conference opponent Lake Forest (Ill.) 7-1 Nov. 9 at home. Freshman Taylor Schluter and senior Jackie Carroll chipped in a pair of goals each. St. Thomas had a 4-1 lead in the third period, but pumped in three goals in the last 8:42 of the game to add to the lead and get the win. The Tommies also outshot its opponents 37 to 15.

COMING UP

- Today: women's hockey, St. Catherine, 7:05 p.m.
- Today: volleyball, NCAA Regionals, home, 7 p.m.
- Tomorrow: volleyball, NCAA Regionals, home, 7 p.m.
- Tomorrow: football, Northwestern (Minn.), 1 p.m.
- Tomorrow: men's cross country, NCAA Central Regional Championships, 11 a.m.
- Tomorrow: women's cross country, NCAA Central Regional Championships, noon
- Tomorrow: women's hockey, St. Catherine, home, 2 p.m.
- Tomorrow: women's basketball, Pacific Lutheran (Wash.), 3 p.m.
- Tomorrow: men's and women's swimming and diving, St. John's Fall Invite, noon
- Sunday: women's basketball, Puget Sound (Wash.), 3 p.m.