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VOLLEYBALL STATE TOURNAMENT

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CLASS 3A SEMIFINALS

Benilde-SM, Marshall sweep to final

By JOE GUNTHER
Special to the Star Tribune

Benilde-St. Margaret's made a plan and followed it. Eventually, the Red Knights, after a slow start, defeated second-seeded Mason-Monteville 25-15, 25-22, 25-13 on Thursday in the semifinals of the Class 3A volleyball state tournament at Xcel Energy Center.

The Red Knights (2-7) received a late push to win the first set. They took their first lead of the match at 22-15.

"Once we started picking up on the shots they were making, we started switching up our shots," Red Knights junior Ery Solferri said. "We followed our game plan, which we didn't start out doing."

The Red Knights (25-15) led 14 in the second set before faltering. They never led in the third set after the Red Knights scored six straight points to take a 12-4 lead.

"I don't think we were exhausted physically, but I think mentally we were," Red Knights senior Whitney Dema said. "We were playing as six individuals on the court and not as a team. That's what it came down to."

Lily Egner led the Red Knights with 19 kills. Sierra Lamkin had 11 kills, Michaela Dooley had 23 digs and Elery Clark had 35 assists.

Demas led the Red Knights with 10 kills and 11 digs, and Abby Dineen had 21 assists.

Marshall 3, Grand Rapids 0: The top-seeded Tigers won the other semifinal 25-10, 25-10, 25-10 over the fourth-seeded Thunderhawks.

The Tigers' frontcourt duo of Leah Jones and Raasi Wendorff was too much for the Thunderhawks. The seniors recorded 11 and 10 kills, respectively, and provided stout defense at the net.

"It's more difficult to get points," Thunderhawks junior Brya LaPlant said. "Obviously it is tough losing when there is nothing in front of you. When you have a block as big as they have, sometimes you're not going to be able to swing at 100 miles per hour every time. You're gonna have to make more shots and be smarter."

Wendorff led the way for Marshall (2-2). She connected with setter Lauren Wherry for five straight kills in the first set to set the tone. Wherry finished with 32 assists.

"Wendorff and Wherry are good friends. There's a little rivalry between those two," Tigers coach Dan Westby said. "I really thought those two made a good connection today. They had that secret sauce going. It certainly worked out well for us. Raasi was really dialed in. Lauren did a good job of realizing that and found ways to get her the ball."

Leah Jones had 10 kills, Caitlyn Christensen 27 digs for the Tigers.

Lindsay Skacie led the Thunderhawks (2-6) with 22 digs. Kira Callen had 12 digs, Justa Rantala had 10 digs and LaPlant had 21 assists.

Marshall's Alexea Bednarek (14) bumped a shot to keep play alive against Grand Rapids in one of the Class 3A volleyball semifinals Friday.

DARIN KUIJES - GOLF PHOTO BY STAR TRIBUNE

CLASS 1A SEMIFINALS

Mayer Lutheran, Minnetota win

By JOE GUNTHER
joe.gunther@startribune.com

Once Mayer Lutheran overcame the tension, it overcame its opponent.

The second-seeded Crusaders ran away from fourth-seeded Mabel-Canton on Friday, winning 25-5, 25-4, 25-5, 25-11 in the semifinals of the Class 1A volleyball state tournament at Xcel Energy Center.

Mayer Lutheran will play top seed Minnetota on Saturday afternoon for the title.

The Crusaders (26-5) made unforced errors after unforced errors to drop the first set, but things started to click in the second set. From there, the Crusaders took over.

"After that first set we all realized that we were all kind of like tennis," Crusaders junior Danica Martin said. "When we got back in the huddle, we started trying to get back together, encouraging each other and picking each other up."

The Crusaders (25-5), loaded with underclassmen, could not keep pace with the Crusaders. Eight of the 10 players on the Mabel-Canton roster are sophomores or freshmen.

"When you win a set, you can't go into the next set with all that confidence because the other team is going," Crusaders senior Sophie Morken said. "I knew right away that they weren't playing to their full potential and we were. To be able to beat them, they needed to be down a little bit, and they were never down."

Gabrielle Woodhead led the Crusaders with 16 kills and 15 digs. Madison Gantlow had 12 kills, 24 assists and 16 digs. Sarah Morken led the Crusaders with 29 assists and 16 digs. McKenzie Kelly had 27 digs and Kaley Topolouski had 12 digs.

Minnetota 3, Belgrade-Bronson 0: The Vikings had to rally late to win the first and second sets and then rolled in the third set to defeat the fifth-seeded Jaguars 25-21, 25-10, 25-15.

Coach Hayley Fralin straightened things out with some advice during a timeout. Stop being 'little brats,' sophomore Elvira Farris said the team was told.

Farris said: "I felt like we were playing like six individuals... That's not the kind of volleyball that we play. We play as a team, we stay up. I think the atmosphere got to us a little bit again today. I think we were putting pressure on ourselves and we just weren't playing loose. We were hitting little, little things get at us. So, I had to say a few things in the timeout."

The Jaguars (26-7) had leads of 19-10 in the first set and 20-16 in the second before the Vikings rallied.

"We made too many unforced errors, which we could have limited," Jaguars senior Harley Roering said.

The tied set was different for the Vikings (13-3). They jumped to an 8-2 lead and never let the Jaguars within three points.

Ireland Stassen led the Vikings with 24 assists, 10 kills and 14 digs.

CLASS 2A SEMIFINALS

Top two seeds find their way to the final

By HEATHER BULL
Special to the Star Tribune

Top-seeded Pequot Lakes will play for a state championship for the first time.

The Patriots swept fifth seed Concocha Academy 25-10, 25-10 in the Class 2A volleyball state tournament semifinals Friday evening at Xcel Energy Center.

Pequot Lakes sticed a 12-2 run in the second set to take control of the match. Seven of those points were scored via powerful kills from junior outside hitter Ella Kotschob.

"I just kept looking at my coaches going, 'Boy, it's the hot,'" Pequot Lakes coach Christine Gaudy said. "Her hits are no explosion."

Kotschob ended the match with 23 kills.

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Pequot Lakes will play Cannon Falls for the championship Saturday afternoon.

Pequot Lakes (29-4) put distance between itself and its opponent quickly in each set. The Patriots put the exclamation point on the match with a 30-7 run to close it out.

Pequot Lakes' Masi Martin and Grace Hoffman registered 11 kills each. Having multiple good hitters, passers and setters is important for the team success, Martin said.

"If one person's off one night, we always know that we have two or three people behind them ready to do the job as well as they can," she said.

The Patriots (22-11) were challenged by that "well-balanced" attack, coach Kim Davis indicated, and she said Pequot Lakes "was a fanfare offense tonight."

"I think it was a little bit of a faster offense than we've seen before or we've used," said senior Ava McInague, who led the Patriots with 10 kills. "Just adjusting to that was a little bit of a challenge for us."

Cannon Falls 3, Annandale 0: The second-seeded Bombers swept into their first Class 2A championship match, winning 25-21, 25-14, 25-17.

Slippage was expected this season because Cannon Falls (28-7) graduated seven seniors from last year's state tournament team.

"That we've shown everybody that's not who we are at all," said 6-1 junior middle hitter Madison Burg, who had a match-high 17 kills.

The third-seeded and fourth-seeded Bombers used a 7-0 run to pull away from Annandale (2-5).

Cannon Falls senior libero Ryan Schoenfelder had 16 digs and surpassed 1,000 digs in her career.

"I think it was a little bit

ANTHONY BOVIELLO - GOLF PHOTO BY STAR TRIBUNE

Mayer Lutheran middle blocker Danica Martin celebrated after the Crusaders won the second set of a Class 1A semifinal match vs. Mabel-Canton on Friday.

ANTHONY BOVIELLO - GOLF PHOTO BY STAR TRIBUNE

Pequot Lakes' Ella Kotschob (11) bumps a shot to keep play alive against Cannon Falls in one of the Class 2A volleyball semifinals Friday.

CHRISTINA MERRILL - SPORTS PHOTO BY STAR TRIBUNE

Pequot Lakes' Masi Martin (11) bumps a shot to keep play alive against Cannon Falls in one of the Class 2A volleyball semifinals Friday.

CHRISTINA MERRILL - SPORTS PHOTO BY STAR TRIBUNE